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# SKETCH

OF THE

# LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS

OF

# MADAME DE STAËL.

LONDON:
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A. L. G. NECKER,
BARONNE DE STAËL HOLSTEIN.

# SKETCH

OF THE

# LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS

OF

# BARONESS DE STAËL-HOLSTEIN.

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BY

MADAME NECKER DE SAUSSURE.

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*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.*

LONDON:
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# MADAME DE STAËL.

## INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

REQUESTED by the children of Madame de Staël, to commit to writing the observations I have had an opportunity of making during the course of a long intimacy with their mother, I accede to their wishes, without stopping to consider how far I may be equal to the task, or reflecting on the sorrow it will awaken anew in my mind. I am swayed by a feeling superior to every personal consideration. If the friend, the near relation, honoured by Madame de Staël

with the appellation of sister, succeed in painting her as she appeared to that friend, she will render her name still more beloved than it is even at present. Having never been able to make an adequate return to those outward marks of attachment, in which I have often been obliged to confess my inferiority, I shall at least pay a feeble tribute to her memory.

The characteristic features of Madame de Staël have never yet been embodied in one whole; their astonishing combination has not yet been explained; and the light in which she has hitherto been exhibited, more brilliant than true, is far, very far, from displaying every thing good and interesting in her. Nothing that she has produced is comparable to herself. Possessing a mind superior to her most celebrated works, a heart outstripping her most generous actions, she concentrated in herself a focus of light and warmth, of which the scattered rays were only feeble emanations.

It were to be wished, on many accounts, that the children of Madame de Staël had themselves undertaken the task of making their mother

known to the world. Formed by her, animated by her spirit, they would prove what she was, by what they are; and no one can be more capable or more worthy to depict her. However, not to mention that their remembrance embraces but a very short period, their too close and sacred connexion with the object of their regret, their sorrow too acute, perhaps too captious, would have exposed them to peculiar difficulties. Children cannot speak of an illustrious and adored mother with an appearance of impartiality. A kind of apprehensive modesty, an emotion incessantly reviving, would alternately constrain their expressions and disturb their thoughts, when they attempted to give vent to sentiments so deeply felt. They would be conscious of being deemed partial, and would not dare to pour out their hearts. Their pride would always be hurt, whether they seemed to solicit applause, or checked the expression of their just enthusiasm. On the other hand, a love approaching too near to adoration would almost prohibit examination, and they would avoid employing a thousand character-

istic tints. In short, too remote from the station of ordinary spectators, too closely united in affection and concern for her whose loss they deplore, all their efforts to exalt her glory would only prove their own regard. The great talents, the experienced pen, of Madame de Staël alone could surmount such obstacles: and even her tract on the private life of her father, a masterpiece of eloquence and feeling, did not obtain, at the time of its appearance, the success it merited.

It is not the history of Madame de Staël, however, that I propose to write. She herself has recorded the most memorable events of her life, either in her work on the French Revolution, or in the memoirs she began under the title of *Dix Années d'Exil*, "Ten Years of Banishment." Besides, her private life, like that of most women, exhibits little of the prominent and peculiar features of her character. To men alone it is granted, to paint themselves by their actions, and to imprint in the course of their physical existence that of their thoughts. Contemplated in its external appearances, the life

of Madame de Staël displays nothing of what we have a right to expect; and who will venture to look within; to declare what she has felt? Who can resolve to give a faint, nay frequently an erroneous, idea of what she would have expressed so truly and so forcibly? How, too, while her contemporaries are still acting their parts on the stage of the world, shall we separate hers from the rest? how distinguish what belongs to her, in the delicate and complex tissue of the history of the present day? She alone, with her exquisite discernment, her just and unerring tact, could have discriminated the parts of others and her own, and have done justice to herself, without trenching for a moment on her inexhaustible goodness of heart. I shall avoid, therefore, attempting what she alone could have executed. A faithful history of her life and feelings is among the number of those hoped-for treasures, which she has carried with her to the grave.

In regard to public affairs, Madame de Staël, as the daughter of Mr. Necker, as a witness of memorable events, has placed her testimony on

record. Farther than this, little remains to be culled. The influence she had upon her times is scarcely reducible to narration. She diffused her principles, she communicated her sentiments: but it was not in her character to give direct counsels, or to dictate resolutions. Always aware of the situation of affairs, seeing what the moment required to be done or avoided, she has uttered truths, and impressed them on the minds of others, and her influence is confounded with the impulse of events.

It is in the works of Madame de Staël that we must seek the traces of her character; traces, perhaps imperfect, yet extraordinarily brilliant. There her friends will find, with impressions ever new, remembrances that cannot be effaced: there they will recognize even the affections of Madame de Staël, for every thing in her came from the heart, even her thoughts. They who knew what she was discern the stamp of her character amid the effusions of talent. While we read, we see her anew: a thousand observations, made on her heretofore indistinctly, assume consistence, and we can venture the more

safely to announce them, as we advance nothing without proof. Besides, as Madame de Staël was incessantly generalizing her remarks, both on herself and on events, her works are as it were memoirs of her life in an abstract form; and it is by examining them in the order in which they were composed, that we can pursue the course of her moral existence.

The productions of Madame de Staël tend to exhibit her with the greater fidelity, because in writing she always sought rather to express what passed in her own mind than to produce a work of art. Literary fame was not with her a primary object of life: her works were the natural result of that prodigious abundance of ideas, which were continually passing through her mind, and could not be seized and fully developed but by committing them to paper. She did not reflect, because she wished to write: she wrote, because she had reflected. Madame de Staël and her works cannot be considered separately: her talent as a writer, and her eloquence in conversation, reciprocally supported and as it were verified each other. The one proves that her

rapid and astonishing phrases would bear examination; the other, that her most excellent productions flowed from a living source, and were as if poetically inspired.

History will mention Madame de Staël in several points of view. Posterity will see in her an author, who makes a new era in literature, and perhaps in political science; a woman extraordinary, if not unique, in her talents; and, lastly, a person, who exercised a direct influence in a period most fertile of great events. The numerous journeys of Madame de Staël; the curiosity excited by her wonderful talents for conversation; that charm and those qualities, which excited at first the approbation, and then the affection of her auditors; the distinguished men of all nations, by whom she was every where surrounded; the highly interesting nature of the questions she discussed; and, lastly, the strength, the originality, and at the same time the elegance, of her expressions; have occasioned her repartees to circulate, and her opinions to be diffused, from one end of Europe to the other.

Still we shall consider Madame de Staël but cursorily in this point of view. What we have to examine is herself. We shall inquire into the cause of the effects she has produced, not ascertain their extent. It is the business of those to describe a great phenomenon, who have had a near view of it; others may estimate its external influence.

The study of the character of Madame de Staël is so much the more interesting, as it is in some sort the study of human nature at large. In her we see in relief what takes place confusedly in most minds, for she was extraordinary only from the commanding extent of her faculties. In her every thing was original, nothing fantastic. No foreign shape had been imposed on her; even education had left on her no profound traces. But if her decisions, in their impetuous sincerity, were never influenced by public opinion, they were never promulgated from caprice, or from unevenness of temper. She introduced you to a poetic region, to a new world, yet resembling our own, where every object, though magnified,

though more striking, more vividly coloured, still preserved its wonted figure and proportion.

In other respects, no quality, no disposition natural to the human species, was wanting in her. She remained a stranger only to what is puerile or factitious. In every kind of emotion, every sort of enthusiasm, she participated; of every mode of viewing things she was mistress; and whatever of great or interesting has displayed itself in the human heart, in different climes and in divers periods of civilisation, found sympathy in her.

On the most essential point, that of religion, the example of Madame de Staël is still instructive. Her independent mind, her intellect, friendly to light and acquiring it in all directions, was every day more and more convinced of the sublime truths of Christianity. In her, life fulfilled its purpose, since it conducted her through many vicissitudes to those grand ideas, to which so many various roads equally lead.

A portrait drawn by the hand of friendship

may probably be mistrusted. Will the reader have any just cause for rejecting my testimony? This is a question I am not capable of answering. I will only say with frankness, that assuredly I have no intention of injuring the memory of my friend, but I am equally far from any design of flattering her. We may engage to be sincere, without being impartial. It is true, I have been fascinated. The part of a judge devoid of passions cannot be mine; yet I hope to prove, that my warm affection has not blinded me, and that the powerful effect produced on my heart was no more than adequate to its cause. Besides, to whom would you apply, to obtain a just knowledge of Madame de Staël? To her enemies? Assuredly not. To indifferent persons? No one, who truly read her heart, could possibly remain so. Whoever has contemplated her sufficiently near to be able to draw her character must have been compelled to love her.

Indeed, to Friendship herself it is necessary, to paint with truth: for a likeness is still more interesting than beauty. When Madame de

Staël is the subject, perhaps we have to guard against a propensity to mark every feature a little too strongly. We would paint genius, and genius has always a decided form of individuality. It elevates itself to the ideal, it realizes the ideal in its works, but it is not the ideal itself; and the mortal whose conceptions seize and enchant our minds must perhaps possess an originality too decided to be perfectly regular.

When she who has seduced our imagination by the brilliancy of her talents is found to be affectionate, devoted, confiding, perfectly good and sincere in all the relations of life, it is very difficult not to remain firmly attached to her. Accordingly, the affection inspired by Madame de Staël has been in its various kinds singularly vivid and profound. Her power of attraction was irresistible: at first she astonished, but speedily she captivated. Hers was not that kind of energy which may be displeasing; and she displayed a seducing mixture of strong feeling with a pliable disposition. There was in her so much sincerity, so much affection, so

much greatness; the divine flame was so ardent in her heart, so luminous in her mind, that in attaching yourself to her, you would seem to follow the noblest inclinations; and she was contemplated as an object standing alone, in regard to the interest she inspired, and the irresistible and dramatic effect she produced. In her, the genius and the woman were intimately united: if the one maintained its ascendancy, the other seemed to yield by its susceptibility of suffering, and the most vivid admiration felt for her was never without a mixture of tender pity. Her talents penetrated through every part; they sparkled in her eyes, marked her slightest phrases, imparted to her kindness, to her pity, a pathetic and subduing eloquence, but embittered her existence. That prodigious emotion, that fire, which communicated themselves to her writings, could not deaden themselves in her fate. Her heart, if I may be allowed the expression, was more alive than any person's. She loved more, she saw, she thought more; she was more capable of a devoted attachment, and of action, and occasion-

ally of enjoyment; but she also suffered more vividly, and the intensity of her sorrow was dreadful. Her understanding is not to be accused of her sufferings; her superior acquirements would only have afforded her consolation: it was her great, her devouring imagination, that imagination of the heart, her lever for moving the hearts of others, which shook her own, and disturbed its tranquillity. And this gift, perhaps of all the most sublime—this gift, unique in its combination with others equally astonishing—made of her a daring genius and an unhappy woman. There was too great a disproportion between her and others. She comprehended the arrangement of human affairs long before she resigned herself to it. Life, too cruel to her in its pains, was too monotonous in its enjoyments; and this noble proof of the immortality of the soul, the inequality of our fate to our wishes, acquired, a fresh degree of evidence in contemplating Madame de Staël. She gave us the idea of a superior intelligence, whom a jealous fate had subjected to the miseries and illusions of this

world, and whose high prerogatives only rendered her more sensible of the emptiness and wretchedness of human life.

Such was Madame de Staël when she composed Corinna, the masterpiece of her youthful talents. From that period another kind of greatness displayed itself in her; and it appeared, that the loftiness of her thoughts was more the result of her character than of her imagination. Her long resistance to a tyrannical power, the great sacrifices made by her to noble opinions, obtained for her the first of rewards—an increased invigoration of her finest qualities. Her mind was then strengthened, and she found her equipoise at a loftier height. With that exquisite feeling, those just views, which prompted her to say in one of her earliest works, that "morality is the nature of things*," she constantly exerted herself to discover in every wrong the necessary cause of a change. Absolutely incapable of hatred, if

* Mr. Necker and Madame de Staël have reciprocally attributed these words to each other.

she have been moved to express strong indignation, it was when she saw the happiness of mankind disregarded; so that even her anger originated in pity. From this passionate desire for the good of all men, she acquired a sagacity that was connected with the desire itself; a sagacity, ardent, generous, full of compassion; a sagacity, which, not bottoming itself on any particular evil, was never satisfied till it found the point of reconciliation between the circumstance and the principle, and that no one had too great sacrifices to make. Such was the character of her later years; such is the character of that astonishing work, in which we have fancied we have beheld her re-appearing all radiant with immortality; of that work, where, demanding from all the French nation a strict account of the enviable destiny prepared and eminent gifts bestowed on it, she still animates it with hope, and points out to it, with her celestial palm-branch, the path of true glory and sage liberty.

The superiority of Madame de Staël was certainly a great natural phenomenon, rather than

the result of study and of circumstances. In any situation she would have been a very remarkable person. Still it is not the less true, that a rare concurrence of external causes favoured the first expansion of her intellect, and that I shall proceed to examine.

I was not myself acquainted with her in infancy, but I can impart with confidence the information that I derived from the fountain head. When I come to the period at which she entered the career of literature, I shall trace the progress of her mind in her works, borrowing from the events of her life what may be necessary to point out the motives that led to her writings, and I shall end with collecting, under the head of the *domestic and social life of Madame de Staël*, those observations on her character and conduct which I do not find an opportunity of inserting before.

## OF THE EDUCATION OF MADAME DE STAËL, AND HER EARLY YEARS.

The mother of Madame de Staël, Madame Necker, at the time of her marriage, had enjoyed a more extensive and finished course of education than that of her daughter at the same age. By her father, a learned clergyman, she had been instructed in branches of learning not common in her sex, and that spirit of method, which leads to the acquisition of knowledge of every kind. Endowed with firmness of character, great strength of mind, and ample capacity for labour, Madame Necker obtained great success in her studies; and hence she was led to suppose, that every thing might be acquired by dint of study. Accordingly she studied herself, she studied society, individuals, the art of writing, that of conversing, that of housekeeping, and above all that of preserving the purity of her principles, without neglecting any thing that could tend to enlarge her understanding. She paid attention to every thing, made very

acute observations, reduced them to system, and hence framed her rules of conduct. The minutest particulars assumed consequence in her eyes, because she connected them with the great ideas of religion and morality; and her mind, of a metaphysical turn, exerted itself to find their point of contact. In thus making the most trifling occurrences in life a point of duty, she spared herself the troubles of irresolution and regret: but this connexion, not altogether artificial, was never thoroughly perceived but by her who had formed it.

This kind of mental labour is faithfully displayed in the *Mélanges de Madame Necker*, "Miscellanies by Madame Necker." A very remarkable sentiment of delicacy pervades this work, which has been highly admired in foreign countries, particularly in Germany. It is an interesting spectacle, to behold a young and handsome woman passing from a state of profound retirement to a splendid station in life, and thence to the most eminent that can be occupied by a subject, employing a mind, already highly cultivated, on the various objects of a world quite

new to her, and contemplating society at large with the double view of distinguishing and improving herself in it. Nevertheless this constant attention of Madame Necker to what is right was detrimental to the ease of her manners; there was a constraint in her and about her; her temper would probably have been sour, and her will headstrong, had she not early felt the necessity of self-command. Having obtained much by exertion, she expected exertion in others, and was indulgent only when the duty of Christian charity presented itself clearly to her mind. Mr. Necker gave a very just idea of her, when he said to us one day in familiar conversation, "Madame Necker wanted nothing perhaps to make her deemed perfectly amiable, but not being faultless."

Not but she was captivating whenever she chose. She was not sparing of merited praise. Her blue eyes were soft and sometimes caressing; and there was in her countenance an expression of extreme innocence, of ingenuousness even, which formed an engaging contrast with her tall and somewhat stiff figure.

The charms of infancy did not operate very powerfully on Madame Necker. She had subjugated nature too powerfully to be much swayed by instinct. It was necessary for her to admire what she loved; and an affection, springing wholly from sentiment and fancy, could not but be somewhat foreign to her heart. Gratitude was in her eyes the first of ties: consequently she adored her father, and that exalted filial love, which appears to be a distinguishing characteristic of the family, manifested itself already in her. God, her parents, and her husband, whom she adored also as a benefactor, were the only objects of her ardent affections.

She undertook the education of her daughter however with that eager zeal, which the idea of duty ever inspired in her. Her system was totally opposite to that of Rousseau. It is well known that this writer, setting out with the principle, that we acquire ideas only through the medium of the senses, maintained, that we should begin with improving the organs of our perceptions, if we would obtain moral improve-

ment, that should be neither irregular nor illusory. This reasoning, open as it is to attack in itself, has never found favour with lofty and religious minds, because it appears to admit too great a sway of physical over moral nature. Madame Necker, accustomed to combat materialism in all its forms, could not but discern it in this doctrine. Accordingly, she took the opposite road, and sought to act upon mind immediately by mind. She thought it right to accumulate a great number of ideas in the young head, without losing too much time in arranging them in order, persuaded that the understanding grows indolent when spared such a labour. This method too is not without its inconveniences; but, with regard to the development of the intellect, the example of Madame de Staël leads us to presume that it is efficacious.

Mademoiselle Necker, when an infant, was full of cheerfulness, vivacity, and frankness. Her complexion was rather brown, but animated, and her large black eyes already sparkled with kindness and intelligence. The caresses of her

father, who incessantly encouraged the child to prattle, were a little at variance with the more rigid plan of Madame Necker; but the applauses excited by her sallies encouraged her continually to utter new ones: and already she answered the perpetual pleasantries of Mr. Necker with that mixture of gaiety and tenderness, which so frequently mark her conversation with him. The idea of giving pleasure to her parents was with her a motive extraordinarily powerful. Thus, for instance, when only ten years old, observing their great admiration of Mr. Gibbon, she thought it her duty to marry him (and what his person was is well known), that they might be enabled constantly to enjoy a conversation so agreeable to them. This match she seriously proposed to her mother.*

Mademoiselle Necker seems to have had a premature youth instead of infancy. In every thing related to me on this subject, I find only a single circumstance bearing the stamp of that

* The reader is aware that many years before this Mr. Gibbon was desirous of marrying Madame Necker, then Mademoiselle Curchod.

age, and even in this the propensities of talent are observable. In her childhood she amused herself with cutting out paper kings and queens, and making them act a tragedy. She used to hide herself to enjoy this amusement, which was forbidden her: and hence she acquired the only trick she was ever known to have, that of turning about between her fingers a little flag of paper or leaves.

To give an idea at once of Mademoiselle Necker at the age of eleven years, and the house of her mother at that period, I shall quote a few passages from a delightful piece on the infancy of Madame de Staël, written by a lady of great wit, Madame Rilliet, then Madame Huber, who was always very intimate with her. The excellent education of Madame Huber, and an ancient family intimacy, having led Madame Necker to be desirous of her becoming the friend of her daughter, she relates her first interview with Mademoiselle Necker, the transports of the latter at the idea of having a companion, and the promises she made of loving her for ever.

"She spoke to me with a warmth and facility which were already eloquence, and made a great impression on me ..... We did not play like children: she asked me immediately what lessons I learned, whether I were acquainted with any foreign languages, and if I went frequently to the play. When I told her, that I had been only three or four times, she expressed her regret, promised me that I should go often with her, and added, that at our return we would write down the subject of the pieces, and note what had appeared striking to us, as was her custom .....

"She said to me afterwards, 'we will write to each other every morning.' We entered the drawing-room. By the side of Mr. Necker's arm chair was a little wooden stool, on which his daughter seated herself, obliged to sit very upright. Scarcely had she taken her customary place, when three or four old persons came up to her, and accosted her with the tenderest regard. One of them, who had on a little bob wig, took her hands in his, and held them a long time, conversing with her as if she had been

five and twenty. This was Abbé Raynal. The others were Messrs. Thomas, and Marmontel, the Marquis of Pesay, and Baron von Grimm. When we sat down to table, you should have seen how attentive she was! She uttered not a word, yet she seemed as if speaking in her turn, all her flexible features displayed so much expression. Her eyes followed the looks and motions of those who spoke: you would have said she seized their ideas before she heard them. She was mistress of every subject, even politics, which at that time had become one of the leading topics of conversation.....

" After dinner a great deal of company came in. Every one on coming up to Mr. Necker had something to say to his daughter, either complimenting or joking her.... She answered all with ease and elegance: they took pleasure in attacking her, embarrassing her, exciting in her that little imagination, which already appeared so brilliant. The men most distinguished for their talents were those who were most eager to make her talk. They asked an account of what she was reading, pointed out fresh sub-

jects to her, and gave her a taste for study, by conversing with her on what she had learned, or what she had not!"

'In consequence of her mother's system of education, Mademoiselle Necker thus at the same time studied assiduously, heard many conversations on subjects beyond her years, and was present at the representation of the best theatrical pieces. Her pleasure as well as duties all exercised her understanding; and nature, which itself gave her a fondness for this, was seconded in every way. Intellectual faculties of great energy thus acquired a prodigious increase. In 1781, when the *Compte rendu* was published, Mademoiselle Necker wrote a very remarkable anonymous letter to her father, who soon discovered her by its style. She was a writer from the earliest youth. She composed eulogies and portraits. At fifteen she made extracts from the Spirit of Laws, with remarks. Abbé Raynal wished to prevail on her to write something on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes for his great work. This inclination for writing was not encouraged by Mr. Necker,

which nothing but her decided excellence could have induced him to pardon, for he was naturally averse to female authors.

The sensibility of this lady was equally quick. The praise of her parents filled her eyes with tears: of Madame Huber she was passionately fond: at the sight of a person of celebrity her heart would palpitate: What she read too, over the selection of which Madame Necker, more severe than vigilant, did not always preside, produced an extraordinary impression on her. She has since said, that the carrying away of Clarissa was one of the events of her youth. Nature had given Madame de Staël, with great susceptibility, something of seriousness and gravity, which already appeared in her compositions, as well as in her literary tastes. "What pleased her," says Madame Rilliet, "was what made her shed tears."

So many stimulants, such powerful incentives, where, for the securing of happiness at least, a curb is wanting, gave a wonderful activity to the moral being; but the physical being suffered from this, and her lessons in particular

exhausted powers too strongly excited. Long continued attention was always fatiguing to Madame de Staël, and the depth of her attainments on difficult subjects is so much the more surprising. A singular sagacity carried her forward to the goal, without her being perceived in the career.

The health of the young lady, now fourteen, declining daily, Dr. Tronchin was called in. He excited alarm, prescribing an immediate journey into the country, the society of Madame Huber, and to pass the day in the open air, relinquishing all serious study.

On this occasion, Madame Necker was equally vexed and disappointed. This new plan overset all hers. Her ambitious views for her daughter were great, and to renounce the vast acquisition of knowledge was, in her opinion, to renounce all distinction. She had not that pliability, which enables us to vary our means; and being no longer able to promote the progress of her daughter in her own way, she ceased to consider it as her own work.

The liberty thus given to the mind of Made-

moiselle Necker, however, was precisely what enabled it to take so high a flight. With her a life entirely poetical succeeded to a life of study, and the abundant nutriment all flowed to the imagination. She wandered amidst the thickets of St. Ouen, with her friend, and the two young ladies, clothed as nymphs or muses, recited verses, composed poems, or wrote plays, which they immediately acted.

Another happy consequence of this want of employment to Mademoiselle Necker was, that she could avail herself of all the leisure of her father. Seizing every opportunity of being with him, she found extraordinary advantages, as well as pleasure, in his conversation. Mr. Necker was daily more struck with his daughter's wit, and never was this wit more pleasing than with him. She soon perceived, that his mind required to be unbent and amused; and she assumed a thousand forms, tried every thing, hazarded every thing, to obtain from him a smile. Mr. Necker was not prodigal of commendation, his looks were more flattering than his words; and he found it more amusing, as well as more ne-

cessary, to point out what was amiss than what was meritorious. His raillery was close at the heels of the slightest fault; no false pretensions, no exaggeration, nothing erroneous of any kind, could pass unnoticed. "I am indebted to the incredible penetration of my father," Madame de Staël has often said, "for the frankness of my character, and the artlessness of my mind. He unmasked affectation of every kind, and in his company I acquired the habit of thinking that every one saw clearly into my heart."

These conversations, from which Madame Necker was not excluded, but the nature of which was altered by her presence, could not be perfectly agreeable to her. She possessed in a high degree the admiration, the confidence, and even the love of her husband; yet her daughter was better suited than she to a certain pointedness and unexpected turn, occasionally observed in the conversation of Mr. Necker. The young lady possessed the mental qualities of her mother, with many others in addition. Madame Necker would have wished that her

daughter should have pleased by no other qualities than what she herself possessed, and she pleased precisely by those that were most dangerous to her happiness. Madame Necker was tempted to deprecate a success obtained contrary to her advice, while this success seemed to bear testimony against the propriety of that advice itself.

Besides, Mademoiselle Necker was guilty of a thousand giddinesses. Carried away by her vivacity, she was incessantly committing faults; and, while her mother considered little things as appendages of great ones, trifles were of no consequence in her eyes. To avoid any appearance of disobedience, she would place herself at a little distance behind her father: but soon some man of wit would separate from the circle, then another, then a third, and a noisy group would form around her. Mr. Necker would smile involuntarily at something smart that caught his ear, and the original point of discussion was altogether interrupted.

No jealousy, unconnected with the affections of her husband, could possibly enter into the

exalted mind of Madame Necker. If her daughter had surpassed her in her own sphere of excellence, she would have enjoyed her success, which would have appeared the consequence of her own. She would have thought her husband loved her in her daughter. But there was nothing here she could claim for herself; every thing seemed to spring from nature: and while Mr. Necker was enraptured with a mind without a model, as well as without an equal, she experienced impatience and vexation, and a little disapprobation concealed rivalry from her view.

As to her, there was but one road to her approbation. I remember, when the fame of Madame de Staël was quite new to me, I expressed to Madame Necker my astonishment at the prodigious distinction she enjoyed. "It is nothing," answered she, "absolutely nothing to what I would have made of her!" This answer struck me forcibly, because it referred solely to the qualities of the mind, and expressed the most perfect conviction. The extreme gentleness of Mademoiselle Necker's disposition was

striking when her mother reproved her. Perhaps, proud of her success with her father, and every man of eminence, she did not attach sufficient value to the approbation of Madame Necker, and did not exert herself sufficiently to obtain it; but her respect for her mother was always profound, and openly expressed. Endowed from infancy with the gift of those lively and discreet repartees, that infringe no duty, and wound no truth, she never uttered a syllable that in the slightest degree placed her mother in a disadvantageous light.

I shall add but a few words more of Madame Necker, for her influence over her daughter terminated here. This influence was of two kinds. From the parent were transmitted to the daughter an ardent mind, strong feelings, an enthusiastic love of the beautiful and sublime, an acute taste for wit, for talents of all kinds, for every sort of eminence. On the other hand, altogether involuntarily no doubt, she impelled her daughter to contrast herself with her. Mademoiselle Necker had suffered from the restraint imposed upon her by her

mother; and while she was sensible, that she possessed many talents and virtues, it seemed to her, that every thing would go right, if all effort were avoided. She fancied she could become, by the mere movement of a good heart, by the happy impulse of a mind well born, every thing that her mother had been made by dint of reason and guidance; and she was desirous of being the representative of natural endowments, because her mother was that of acquired qualities.

This intention, which unquestionably was but half formed, still influenced too long the judgment of Madame de Staël. Her admiration for virtues of spontaneous impulse was too exclusive, and reduced too much to a system. Natural qualities are the most amiable, no doubt; but to what purpose should we exalt them? Are men to be stimulated either to be proud of what they are, or to despair of what they might become? And what upon earth is more worthy of esteem than a virtuous will?

Madame de Staël herself acknowledged this, when her ideas were matured by reflection, and

particularly when religion, better understood and more strongly felt, displayed things to her in a truer light. Thus every passing year taught her to feel more justly the merit of Madame Necker. "The longer I live," she once said to me, "the better I understand my mother, and the more my heart inclines toward her."

We may then figure to ourselves Madame de Staël, in the period of early youth, advancing with that confidence in life, that promised her nothing but happiness; too benevolent to suppose the existence of hatred, too fond of talents in others to have any suspicion of envy. She praised genius, enthusiasm, inspiration, and was herself a proof of their power. The love of glory, that of liberty, the natural beauty of virtue, the choice of tender sentiments, by turns furnished subjects for her eloquence. Yet, let it not be supposed, that her head was always romantic: she held the reins of her imagination, without suffering its fire to run away with it. Accordingly, in a country where raillery is so much to be dreaded, ridicule found it difficult

to reach her. She rose above the region in which it displays itself.

It is true, before she had yet established her place in society, attempts were made to mislead the public opinion of her. It was not difficult to detect her at fault. It was told, that on such an occasion she had infringed some established custom, offended against etiquette, or disturbed the gravity of an occurrence. Accordingly, an awkward curtsey; a gown-trimming a little deranged, when she was presented at court; her bonnet left behind in her carriage, one day when she went to Madame de Polignac's; were subjects of amusement for all Paris. But she herself caught up these anecdotes, and related them with infinite grace. No malevolence could stand against her goodness; and she had always a singular tact in seizing the answer to be made to blame not expressed. When she appeared most deeply engaged in conversation, she distinguished her adversaries at a glance, disconcerted them, captivated them, or demolished them with a side-wind. She never grew serious, never was irritated; and if the dispute threat-

ened to become grave, she at once had recourse to jocularity, and a happy turn delighted every body. In fine, an attempt to disconcert her would have gained no applause. The whole audience was in her favour; she interested while she amused; and whoever had defeated her could not hope to supply her place.

A man of letters, one of her friends, has thus delineated her in an unpublished portrait, from which I will give a few extracts. Having seen little of her myself during her early youth, I will show the effect she produced in society. The piece assumes the character of a translation from a Greek poet.

"Zulima is but twenty years old, yet she is the most celebrated of the priestesses of Apollo. She is the favourite of the deity; her incense is the most agreeable to him, of her hymns he is most fond. Her voice calls him down from Heaven, when she pleases, to adorn his temple, and to mingle with mortals.

"From the midst of these sacred virgins (the choir of priestesses), on a sudden advances one, whose remembrance will never be effaced from

my heart. Her large black eyes sparkle with genius; her hair, of the colour of ebony, falls in waving ringlets down her shoulders; her features are rather strongly marked than delicate, and appear to announce something beyond the common destiny of her sex. Such should we paint the Muse of poetry, a Clio, or a Melpomene. 'There she is! there she is!' resounded on all sides, as she appeared; and not another breath was heard.

"I had formerly seen the pythoness of Delphi, I had seen the Cumean sybil; they were frantic, their motions were convulsive, they appeared less filled with the presence of a god, than devoted to the furies. The young priestess was animated without being altered, and inspired without intoxication. Her charm was free; and whatever she had of supernatural appeared her own.

"She began to sing the praises of Apollo, accompanying her voice with the sounds of a lyre of ivory and gold. Neither the words nor the music were prepared. By the celestial fire of composition that exalted her countenance,

by the profound and serious attention of the people, it was evident, that her imagination created them both; and our ears, at once ravished and surprised, knew not which to admire most, the facility or excellence of the production.

"Soon after, she laid down her lyre, and discoursed to the assembly on the grand truths of nature, the immortality of the soul, the love of liberty, the charm and danger of the passions. . . . .

"On listening to her merely you would say, that several persons, several minds, several courses of experience, were embodied in one: on contemplating her youth, you would ask, how she could have contrived to exist before she was born, and have a precognition of life. . . . .

"I listen to her, I behold her with transport, I discover in her features charms superior to beauty. What a variety of expression in her countenance! what gradations in the tone of her voice! what a perfect unison between her ideas and words! She speaks, and, if her words

do not reach my ears, their cadence, her gestures, her looks, are sufficient to enable me to comprehend them. She is silent for a moment; her last words resound in my heart, and I read in her eyes what she has not yet said. She is silent altogether; the temple rings with applause, her head modestly inclines, her long eye-lashes descend on her eyes of fire, and the sun remains covered for us!"

In the extreme prodigality of nature toward Madame de Staël, it was her father that compelled her to make a judicious choice. With Mr. Necker her mind improved, both in its solid and ornamental qualities. He taught her jocularity, as he said himself: and with regard to seriousness, she was at once inspired, and guided to truth and moderation, simply by looking at him. But who can say what she owed him on more essential points? Who can say what were the effects of so much love founded on such high admiration? If too many emotions, too many wants, agitated her life, for Mr. Necker to have had the complete direction of it, she never voluntarily disobeyed him. He

had a powerful influence on her, both by his example, and by the perpetual regret she felt for his loss. But how can we appreciate such an influence? The happy effect of paternal virtues continues without our being conscious of it, and resembles the action of the Deity upon the soul.

An attentive inspection discovered much more resemblance between the father and daughter, than the reserve of the one, and the open and communicative manner of the other, would have led us to suppose. With a strength of mind, a capacity of attention, much superior to that of Madame de Staël, Mr. Necker (whom I here depict as he appeared to me in the latter years of his life) displayed, on subjects less various, views equally enlarged. He had the same luminous conceptions, the same penetrating glance and delicacy of observation, the same gaiety amid a disposition to melancholy. He resisted an ardent imagination; and suppressed a warmth of soul, a sensibility, which thus became only the more affecting. Nothing was so touching as his marks of regard, and it

is impossible to recollect them without deep emotion. His expressions, always a little restrained, his animated yet mild looks, penetrated the heart. In them his whole life appeared: you might discern there the death of Madame Necker ever deplored, the approach of his own, his admirable goodness of heart, the ingratitude of men, the grand consolations of religion, and the ardent desire of still doing good. And when his great faculties came to display themselves, when a good cause demanded his support, or noble indignation fired his mind, he gradually warmed, and the still increasing flood of his lofty eloquence swelled to a rapid and impetuous torrent.

Such moments, however, were rare: his heart was agitated, and grew calm most frequently in silence. A somewhat careless dignity prevented him from giving an impulse to conversation that would have reacted on himself, and he resigned himself to that listlessness, which still he dreaded much. It was difficult for him to conceal an antipathy mixed with contempt for imbecility of mind or character; and his mouth,

a little expressive of disdain, formed a contrast with his mild and benevolent looks. Gracefulness, however, captivated him; and, accordingly, he required from women nothing but a natural demeanour: he was very indulgent toward young persons, but confirmed mediocrity was insupportable to him. After he had long champed the bit in an insipid company, nothing could be more diverting than the first burst of his dissatisfaction.

The trite maxims that had been repeated to him, the shades of ridiculousness he had observed, the little views that he had detected, and even the idea that he had perceived others formed of himself, inspired him with expressions the most striking, the most original, that presented the most picturesque contrast with his grave and dignified deportment. A comic power of singular causticity displayed itself in him, and his natural kind-heartedness, which appeared as if by fits through this kind of sally, rendered it still more remarkable. He could easily avoid the display of this talent in his writings; but it is much to be regretted, as Ma-

dame de Staël has hinted, that the continual loftiness of his style has not allowed him to give sufficient relief, or to paint in colours sufficiently striking, the number of new, salutary, and pleasing ideas, that he has really expressed. The melody distracts our attention from the words in reading them; and there is a great deal of wit in his musical periods, the effect of which is lost.

After having given a general idea of Madame de Staël in her youth, and of the two persons who had the greatest influence on that period of her life, I shall proceed to her literary career. It is not her merit as a writer that I profess to estimate: I shall consider the works of Madame de Staël as facts in her history, or as the depositories of her thoughts; the literary point of view being, perhaps, neither the most important with respect to herself, nor that which is fittest for me to choose.

## OF THE WRITINGS OF MADAME DE STAËL.

### *Period the First.*

THOUGH the works of Madame de Staël have generally been dictated by the same spirit, we may discern in them a character somewhat different, according to the period at which they were composed. I shall divide them, therefore, into three classes, corresponding to three different periods of her life: the first, a very short one, that which preceded the French revolution; the second, extending from the commencement of the revolution to the death of Mr. Necker; and the third, posterior to this event.

The rising reputation of Madame de Staël caused an eagerness for her slightest productions. Imitations, characters drawn by her, and other attempts of this kind, which, at the time of her entrance into the world, were the subjects of certain contests in its circles, were read with avidity: and already in these light compositions might be remarked that delicacy

of thought, those lively strokes of sentiment, which have always stamped her manner. But, previous to this period, and before her marriage, she had written a comedy in verse, which was soon followed by two tragedies.

It is unnecessary to say, that these pieces are but very imperfect sketches. They were not intended for the press: but Madame de Staël has sometimes read them in pretty large companies, where they met with uncommon applause, which shows the instinct of talent in the judges, for it was chiefly as happy presages, that they must have been considered.

The leading idea of the comedy entitled *Sophia, or Secret Sentiments*, did not appear irreprehensible to Madame Necker. Sophia is a young orphan, who has conceived for her guardian, the husband of her friend, a passion of which she has no suspicion: but the excuse the heroine has, that she is ignorant of the sentiment she expresses, might seem in rigid eyes not to extend to the author. The subject, however, is treated with delicacy, or to speak

more properly, with innocence. We perceive, that Mademoiselle Necker thought only of painting a hopeless attachment. Besides, the highly excellent moral character of the wife, the rival of Sophia, balances the effect of the latter part.

It is astonishing, that so young an authoress, whose head was already filled with such a multitude of ideas, did not endeavour more to vary her means of producing an effect. Mademoiselle Necker has confined herself entirely within the sphere of sentiment; and her fertile mind, contenting itself with one colour, has only multiplied its shades. The *Secret Sentiments* constitute a piece entirely of love, and that love unhappy. A gentle and melancholic sensibility reigns throughout. But in this sort of elegy, four situations and four different characters are clearly and distinctly portrayed. The style, as Madame de Staël afterwards observed, when she published it, is not correct; but it is fluent and harmonious. She possessed so much facility, that it seems as if in every thing she had begun with habit.

In point of difficulty a tragedy is very different from a comedy. *Jane Grey* is in every respect inferior to *Sophia*. Still it possesses a loftier spirit of inspiration, and more marked indications of talent. The part of Lady Jane Grey has a gentle and pathetic tint; that of Northumberland is conceived with a vigour that appears very astonishing, when the age of the authoress is considered. In the part last mentioned some very energetic verses have been particularly noticed.

*Jane Grey* is, perhaps, the only one of Madame de Staël's productions, in which an animated picture of happiness is to be found. The situation of the heroine at the commencement, it is true, affords what in the eyes of the authoress herself must have constituted the idea of true felicity; a marriage with an adored hero, the enjoyments of a superior intellect, and a prospect for the future, either splendid or fatal, but in either case glorious. As Madame de Staël too always considered gratitude, and consequently religion, essential requisites to happi-

ness, she has given the character of Lady Jane Grey a very decided religious tint *.

Perhaps it has been too generally supposed, that the picture of happiness is not well adapted to poetical effect. But we feel a certain tenderness of affection for those who know how to be happy: and in tragedy particularly, where the storm begins to threaten, a degree of truth, a singular forcibleness, results from the pleasing calm of the first impressions. I cannot avoid the pleasure of quoting a few verses that depict this plenitude of content, the expression of which is as rare in fictions as it is in real life, among writers of genius. It is Lady Jane Grey that speaks.

"Au lever du soleil, alors qu'en m'éveillant,
Je retrouve mon ame et recommence à vivre,
A sentir mon bonheur quelque temps je me livre,
J'éprouve le plaisir de m'apprendre mon sort;
J'y pense lentement; ma voix nomme Guilfort."

* The authoress does not seem to be aware that this was the real character of the heroine.—Tr.

"When with the rising sun I ope my eyes,
I find my soul again, and live anew;
My happiness I feel; indulge the thought;
My heart contemplates with delight my fate,
And my tongue vibrates with the name of Guildford."

It appears that the history of Lady Jane Grey had singularly struck Madame de Staël, for she has again introduced that lady in her *Reflections on Suicide*, which she composed in 1811. She wished to prove, that the expectation of a horrible death is not a sufficient reason in the eyes of a true Christian for shortening his own days. With this view, she imagines a letter written by Lady Jane Grey in answer to a proposal made her, to avoid her execution by taking poison. This letter, in which the pure spirit of Christianity breathes, possesses the most affecting and sublime beauty.

It is to be observed, that these her first works, written at such a tender age, have a more perfect and genuine truth of expression in the sentiments, than those of the following period, which however display a loftier flight. Yet I am not certain, that the marks of genius ex-

tolled in these pieces would be deemed sufficient to excuse their defects beyond the circle of friendship. Jane Grey, in particular, will not bear examination. They are curious documents of the history of a person of great talents; but their real merit consists in what they announce.

Nearly about the same time, Madame de Staël composed a second tragedy, entitled *Montmorency*. This piece, which was never printed, contains some fine scenes; and the part of Cardinal de Richelieu is depicted with spirit; but the character of the hero, drawn into rebellion by an ambitious wife, cannot have a very dramatic effect. It is to be presumed, therefore, that a private sentiment influenced the choice of the subject; and that, at the period when the ties of a friendship, that adorned or consoled the life of Madame de Staël, began to be formed, she took a pleasure in repeating the agreeable name of her friend*.

The taste of Madame de Staël declared itself at first for poetry: but, after these dramatic attempts, she scarcely composed more than a sin-

* M. le Viconte Mathieu de Montmorency.

gle piece of any length in verse. The mechanism of versification has been carried to such perfection in France, that she must either have contented herself with a state of inferiority, or have submitted to a degree of labour that would have deadened her fire. Perhaps the irregular flights of her genius could not submit to the shackles of metre. She would have lost in them her originality, and has shown herself a greater poetess in prose, than she would probably have been in verse.

## *Three Novels.*

To pursue the order of time, I must here mention *three novels*, which Madame de Staël composed before the age of twenty, though she did not publish them till 1795. She did not consider these light productions as of any great importance. Thus she says of them herself in the advertisement: "The situations are rather hinted at than developed, and their whole merit consists in painting a few sentiments of the heart." In fact, we find in them enchanting

strokes of sensibility; but the situations, that had seduced the young authoress, are too strong for the frame; and it is evident, that Madame de Staël invented them at a time when she was in quest of striking subjects for the stage. A tragic vein always pervaded her imagination. To produce great effects, to excite strong emotions, that thirst of genius and of youth, was long predominant with her. Accordingly, in these novels, she has been prodigal of death with a degree of temerity. He alone, whom death has wounded in his tenderest affections, has a right to handle this terrible subject: he only can speak of the pains he has felt, in a manner worthy of them; he only can invoke the image of the king of terrors without a kind of profane levity.

The publication of these novels, however, only served as an occasion for that of the highly distinguished essay, which is given as an introduction to them. This is a treatise on fiction, abounding with new views and pleasing ideas. The different kinds of fiction, and their suitableness to the different degrees of civilization, are

there appreciated with uncommon sagacity, and the imagination is analysed by a mind accustomed to live with it.

### *Letters on Rousseau.*

But her most finished work of this period was her *Letters on the Writings and Character of J. J. Rousseau.* In these we find not only the vivacity of youth, but its greatest charm; what it is, and what it promises to be. We discover in them a thinker, a moralist, a woman capable of painting the passions; but confusedly, and as if seen through a cloud. There are deposited the germs of all the opinions that Madame de Staël afterward developed. She traverses an immense field of ideas, she skims the surface of a multitude of subjects; and, though her course is guided by that of Rousseau, she accompanies her author with such a light and rapid step, she crosses and precedes him so often, that he has much rather excited than supported her. She always speaks from the abundance of her thoughts. She yields to the desire of pour-

ing out her whole soul: and we infer, that if she had chosen any other subject, she would have treated it perhaps with less warmth of feeling, but would have written with equal facility and eloquence. Amid all the enthusiasm with which Rousseau inspires her, she preserves the independence of her mind, scatters her own thoughts with profusion, and does it with the gracefulness, the slight embarrassment of a young woman, who feels rather afraid of displaying too much vigour. It is in these fragments of ardent sensibility, and particularly in her bursts of admiration and love for her father, that she has poured out her whole heart. In fine, notwithstanding a few flights, and a few opinions, that savour a little of youth, she is already astonishingly herself in this work. We find her already the person, on whom every thing produces an effect; who examines every thing with her own eyes; who, having her peculiar manner of viewing objects, takes the trouble of explaining to you that manner; and who is continually enlarging the sphere of your ideas; precisely because she changes your point of view.

We find in short the person, who writes not a single line without having thought or felt what she writes; and who always expresses, if not precisely the true state of things, at least the true state of the impression they make on herself. Perhaps this work more resembles in its manner her best performances, than it does those of an intermediate period. In this first period, when, as in the last, Madame de Staël lived in a society of extraordinary brilliancy, and was greatly distinguished in it, the spirit of conversation imparted clearness, conciseness, and brilliancy to her style.

Perhaps there is even a particular affinity between the *Letters on Rousseau*, and Madame de Staël's posthumous work. Nothing certainly can differ more in subject or in form than these two productions; yet they resemble each other in transparency of diction, and in a certain serenity of mind, pervading the vivacity and even the loftiness of the sentiments. The calm of the morning of life is felt in the one, and that of the evening in the other. When she composed the Letters, she had not yet been exposed to the

storm: and accordingly, amid a multitude of enchanting remarks, we find neither the strong impressions, nor the profound knowledge of the human heart. It is almost always suffering that impels us to search into our inmost self: the abyss must open, before a ray of light can penetrate into it. The analysis of the effects of sorrow, the employment of very gloomy colours, in contrast with the luminous strokes of her thoughts, were among the grand instruments of Madame de Staël. In this respect she appeared to stand alone: yet, on reading over again the *Letters on Rousseau*, where she has endeavoured to put a check upon herself, we are pleased to detect her wit, and even her sensibility, invested with milder hues.

They who have devoted themselves to the worship of genius, are desirous of its producing on them the most powerful effects. They would experience its power, even if it be injurious and cruel; and, as they alone require from it proofs of strength, they alone have a right to bestow on it the meed of fame. But the majority of readers require nothing more than

to be agreeably amused. There are a thousand doubtful conditions, which an embellished representation of life may lull with pleasing allusions; and perhaps it requires a person to be very happy, or very unhappy, to be fond of shedding tears. It is because the *Letters on Rousseau* gently rouse and exercise the heart and mind, without requiring too much from either, that their charms have been so universally felt.

Still, without offence to those who would include the general reprobation of an author in the commendation of his first attempt, this work, astonishing as it is, considering the writer's age, and brilliant and distinguished as it would be, if written at any age, displays neither the lofty imagination, nor the transcendant superiority, of which Madame de Staël has since given proofs.

## WRITINGS OF MADAME DE STAËL.

### *Period the Second.*

A SHORT time after the publication of the *Letters on Rousseau*, the French Revolution commenced. In this work Madame de Staël had already paid illustrious homage to liberty, and she had been inflamed with the love of freedom from an early age. Placed near the centre of action, elevated by her understanding to the height of all its principles, and her sentiments affected by all its results, neither her character nor her situation allowed her to remain unconcerned in the general commotion. When every brain was fired, hers could not remain cool. She admired the English constitution not less than she loved France. The idea of seeing the French as free as the English, of beholding them placed on the same level with regard to every thing that secures the rights and elevates the dignity of the human species, was in unison with her most ardent wishes.

And when we consider, that to this prospect was added the hope of her father's contributing to this benefit, and receiving the gratitude it would deserve, we cannot be surprised at her enthusiasm. Whatever there was of animation in her heart or mind impelled her in the same course, and she went even farther in it than her father, as if to expose herself to the first shock.

However, the moderation, instilled into Mr. Necker, both by his disposition and his luminous understanding, was soon imposed upon Madame de Staël by her respect for misfortune. From the ardour of her hopes we may judge of what she felt, when she saw her expectations frustrated. With a feeling of pity, even for indifferent persons, so vivid, that it was a personal pain; with an aversion for tyranny, that roused all the faculties of her soul; the reign of terror was to Madame de Staël peculiarly dreadful. Of all those, who had not to deplore the loss of the tenderest objects of their affection, no one could suffer more than she. To the most profound compassion for the evils of all, to dread-

ful apprehensions for her friends, was added the idea, that the name of liberty would be for ever calumniated, and that of her father experience the same fate. What she idolized most upon earth, liberty and the fame of Mr. Necker, seemed to be demolished at one blow.

"It seems to me," says she, *Influence of the Passions*, p. 8, "that the partisans of liberty are those who feel the most profound detestation of the atrocities committed in its name. Their adversaries, no doubt, may have a just horror of them; but as these very crimes furnish arguments for their system, they do not excite in them, as in the friends of liberty, grief of various kinds at once."

Accordingly, during the bloody reign of Robespierre, Madame de Staël was incapable of undertaking any continued labour. All her faculties were absorbed by the desire of snatching victims out of the jaws of death: a desire incessantly reviving, for when she had furnished an asylum to an unfortunate wretch, she thought she had done nothing, till she had saved his nearest friends. Her zeal on this head is so

well known, that it is unnecessary to point it out, and friendship would experience some embarrassment in attempting it.

## *Defence of the Queen—Epistle to Misfortune—Two political Tracts.*

The first time she recovered the use of her talents, was to employ them in the defence of the queen. It is obvious what caution and address were necessary in these dreadful times, not to irritate sanguinary monsters. Even low and ferocious language was then often employed for good ends; but to Madame de Staël this was impossible. She was as incapable of flattering popular tyranny as any other. However, as it was necessary to induce the leaders to listen to her, she essayed every tone, she employed every means, to find an opening in the tiger's skin, and reach the heart of the man. She endeavoured to put the queen out of sight, to show in Marie Antoinette only the lovely woman, the kind and compassionate being, the tender mother, the devoted and courageous

wife. An active and profound feeling, an ingenious and delicate pity, pervade this tract. Shall we say, that Madame de Staël had never been a favourite with the queen? Had she, which was impossible, been hated, proscribed, persecuted by Marie Antoinette, she would have done no less, and would equally have lamented that she could do no more.

She subsequently poured out the grief that oppressed her in an *Epistle addressed to Misfortune*, a short poem, very remarkable for its force and truth of expression. The following verses, in which she points out what the idea of general distress adds to the particular troubles of life, in every unfortunate individual, have been much commended.

" De la Nature enfin le cours invariable
A travers tant de maux ne s'est point arrêté ;
La mort, comme autrefois, se montre impitoyable,
Et l'hymen le plus saint n'en est point respecté.
L'amour peut être ingrat et l'amitié légère,
Et, sous le poids affreux des communes douleurs
Nourissant en secret une peine étrangère,
Seule, à d'autres chagrins on donne encore des pleurs.
Dieu puissant ! du malheur daigne borner l'empire, &c."

"Th' invariable course of Nature still,
Through all these ills, holds on its wonted way:
Death is as pitiless as heretofore,
Nor pays the least regard to wedded bliss.
Love may be fickle, friendship may be false;
Under the fearful weight of common griefs
In secret nourishing a foreign pain,
Alone we give to others' woes a tear.
O God omnipotent, to limit deign
Misfortune's empire!" &c.

After the fall of Robespierre, Madame de Staël published two pamphlets, one shortly after the other: the first entitled, *Réflexions sur la Paix, adressées à Mr. Pitt et au François,* "Reflections on Peace, addressed to Mr. Pitt and the French;" the second, *Reflexions sur la Paix intérieure,* "Reflections on internal Peace." These two pamphlets, the first of which received the praise of Mr. Fox in the British House of Commons, contained the writer's sentiments, as far as she could venture to express them, on the internal and external state of France in 1795; and on this account they are important historical documents. With-

out attempting to discuss the political opinions of Madame de Staël, I will say with respect to these two works, that they were dictated to her by an imperious feeling. The French of both parties may have been desirous of war, and all Europe may have thought it for its interest to continue it; but it was inconsistent with the character of Madame de Staël ever to adopt such a system. Exclusive of the sacred interests of national independence, no arguments could reconcile her to the shedding of blood, and her understanding was ever ready to second her heart in proving the advantage of peace.

The same may be said of the second pamphlet. Independent of her love of liberty, Madame de Staël had always denounced with terror the course, which then seemed, to use her energetic phrase, ready "to compel us a second time to wade through a river of blood."

When we offer advice in a particular situation, we are obliged to compound with the existing evil, and with its necessary consequences: but Madame de Staël does this without sanctioning the evil, or ceasing to reckon it what it is. If

it be possible to read these pieces with impartiality; to estimate the circumstances of the times, and what they required of a writer; we shall be astonished with the strength of argument, the respect for the interests of all, and for every honest opinion, the candour, and not only the wit, which comes of course, but the solidity and sound reasonings that they display. Unquestionably she did not desire the restoration of the monarchy: but was it within the order of possibilities, that such a restoration, which has since brought back to the French the days of liberty and happiness, could take place at the period when she wrote, without dreadful acts of vengeance also taking place? She could not look twenty years forward, for such a period is beyond the scope of human penetration; but within a narrower horizon she foresaw things with singular accuracy. Is it not very remarkable, for instance, that in 1795 she said France could not arrive at a mixed monarchy, unless through a military despotism*?

* I had collected other quotations, and the expressions I had in view were very striking. But perhaps it is better,

*On the Influence of the Passions on individual and national Happiness.*

However abstract and general the question is, that is treated in this work, it was not foreign to the habitual thoughts of a philosophic mind like that of Madame de Staël, even in the midst of troubles and disquietude. Accordingly, though traces of the violent shock communicated by the revolution to every reflecting and feeling person are observable in this work, higher powers are displayed, and their whole body is in motion.

In the *Letters on Rousseau*, we see a youthful mind sparkling with wit, canvassing with fire and sensibility a multitude of brilliant questions, amid the applause of a numerous assembly. In the *Influence of the Passions*, on the contrary, every thing bears the stamp of solitary meditation, and that painful agitation of mind, which is not always to be calmed by the employment

when we cannot exhibit the whole of the circumstances, not to awaken painful remembrances, too frequently marked with injustice.

of the thoughts. The young eagle, terrified by the storms of life, seeks an asylum and a place of repose. The passions are let loose around her. A witness of the rage of parties, and on the point of being a victim to it herself, she has before her eyes one vast ruin. The institutions of antiquity, those which at first had taken their places, all were overturned. Virtue, reason, even liberty itself, in the name of which the passions had been excited, struggled fruitlessly against them. She endeavours then to analyse these mysterious powers; she inquires whether the ardent hopes, that the passions inspire, be ever realised; and the answer is in the negative. The passions must always look to men or to fate for the accomplishment of their wishes, and thus render our happiness dependant on something foreign to ourselves. The love of fame, ambition, vanity, aim at an object continually receding from them. The tender affections demand a reciprocity, which they never believe they attain: and sensual or selfish desires, while they dry up the heart they

agitate, destroy the common focus of all enjoyments.

The passions then form the real obstacles to the happiness of individuals; and they are injurious also to that of nations: for to a people free from violent desires all forms of government would be equally good. However, there is a fundamental distinction between the two cases. Man, considered individually, may always endeavour to stifle his irregular desires; but the passions must still be regarded as indestructible in the species at large, and the art of the legislator consists in leaving them only a proper degree of activity. From this distinction the authoress has divided her plan into two parts: the one treating of the destiny of individuals; the other of the constitutional fate of nations.

The first part of this plan is all that was executed, and it is sufficient to constitute a complete work. In it Madame de Staël has first analysed the passions; next the sentiments, that depend equally upon the nature

of the passions, and on that of the resources that may be opposed to them; and finally, she examines what resources against unhappiness we ought to seek within ourselves.

The analysis of the passions is admirable. Several of these moving powers, which appear to differ only by imperceptible shades, are characterized by such clear and decided features, that they assume perfectly distinct aspects, and the definitions of abstract ideas become in some degree individual portraits. An uncommon talent for satire is displayed in these pictures: yet we do not observe in them that light and animated gaiety which has since shone in the writings of our authoress. She was devoured by vexation at that disastrous period.

A very remarkable chapter is that on the *Spirit of party*. Political fanaticism, its blindness, its insane confidence, its credulity, are drawn by a person so young with the greatest energy and precision: and she afterwards characterizes with the same accuracy the two great classes of enthusiasts, the innovators and the defenders of the past. Every thing in these

pictures is truth, and will remain so as long as the same parties exist.

But what a terrible revelation of the most frightful mystery in human nature is contained in the chapter entitled *Of Crime!* a word by which she understands more particularly cruelty. At a period when Crime stalked abroad unshackled, the spirit of observation alone was insufficient to have traced such a picture. It required a talent that we may term dramatic; that power of imagination, which in a single word, a movement, a look, discovers the whole man, comprehends him to such a degree, as to identify itself with him, to assume for a moment his nature. What a fearful picture of that necessity of intoxication, that convulsive ferociousness, that internal rage, incessantly urging to new crimes him to whom quiet is become a punishment, who feels himself hated because he hates, and who would inflict on others those torments to which he is himself a prey!

And what a ray of light is thrown on the human heart by these words: "If we have any hold on such a character, it is by persuading

him at once that he is completely forgiven!" This, let me observe in confirmation of what is said by Madame de Staël, is one of the causes of the moral change so frequently produced by Religion. She says to the guilty, that he is pardoned in Heaven; he despises the rest, and begins to live anew.

Madame de Staël considers the passions as they endanger happiness, not virtue. She begins with the position, that all happiness supposes the observance of the laws of morality; but she does not say to men, "The passions will perhaps render you criminal;" she says, "The passions will assuredly render you unhappy." For persons to whom the chance of committing a fault is not alarming above all things, this argument is very powerful, as it is founded on the nature of things, on the immutable essence of unrestrained feelings, and not on their uncertain consequences. Accordingly, on whatever basis we wish to establish morality, this part of the work will always be of importance, and the curious observations it contains will not be useless in any system.

Every scheme of practical philosophy should tend to render the will independent of the passions: but when the authoress, with the view of more completely securing this independence, seems to proscribe even the most legitimate affections, does she not bely her own feelings, her own nature? Is it not a less rigid stoicism to say that pain is no evil, than to maintain that innocent love is not a good? Ought friendship, our parental and filial affection, to be sacrificed to cold reasoning? and is it not a cruel employment of talents to depict with the striking minuteness of truth every thing that wounds the heart in its most cherished connexions? The Christian philosopher alone perhaps is justified in dissipating consolatory illusions; and something different from this life should be held out to us, by those who would disgust us with all that is best in it.

It was not the general character of Madame de Staël blindly to follow up a principle to its remotest consequences; and she was commonly warned by an unerring perception of the moment, when the abuse of one rule led to the

violation of another. But let not the reader be deceived. It was not from an affectation of austerity that Madame de Staël maintained such a system; and we may be assured that it was not from coldness of heart. If she delineate with a pen of fire the unhappiness and power of the passions, it is only to the impassioned she addresses herself: others need not her aid, they would not understand her language, it is not with them she sympathizes. There results too from the severity of her counsels, and the warmth of her sentiments, a singular contrast; arising from her having suffered much, and being desirous of deadening in others, and in herself, that excess of animation which is so great a cause of unhappiness.

Unquestionably rash opinions, and expressions too strong, have escaped the authoress, owing to her youth and ardent vivacity. But in forming a general judgment of the morality of the work, we can scarcely charge it with other faults, than those of a philosophy not founded on religion, the destruction of hope, and the ab-

sence of an external motive for the sacrifice of self: faults which the writer has veiled with a tint of sensibility altogether foreign to the philosophy itself.

Madame de Staël does not leave wholly without resource the mortals whom she has freed from the passions: she advises study independent of fame, benevolence regardless of gratitude; and points out as a state sufficiently pleasing, after we have renounced happiness, that tender and musing disposition which she calls melancholy. Religion has all these consolations, and better still; but religion was not then a principle of action or an internal aid with Madame de Staël, and we may appeal from all she has said on this subject to Cæsar better informed, that is, to herself in her later writings.

Her work on suicide in particular forms a very curious object of comparison with the present, as it seems to be a supplement to it, in which Madame de Staël displays the only efficacious remedy for the evils which in the

former work she did little more than point out.

However, when we have acknowledged in the passions a fatal and destructive fever, in the most innocent affections a source of pain and regret; when meditation, benevolence, and a kind of contemplative resignation, are become the only resources on which we can depend, we have unconsciously made a considerable advance on the road to Christianity. We have imbibed its spirit without thinking of its doctrines: and this renders still more interesting a book in other respects so eminently distinguished.

If Madame de Staël did not execute the second part of her plan, it was neither from fickleness, nor from being afraid of the great labour she would have to undergo: for we have since seen what she was capable of in this respect. It is more probable she felt, that, in spite of all her efforts, the two parts of the work would not be sufficiently connected with each other, and that the second would scarcely have answered to its title. In treating on the in-

fluence of the passions on the happiness of nations, the object of Madame de Staël was to prove from history the truth of the opinion she maintained all her life, that political institutions form the education of the people, mould their character, and thus decide their interior state. Now it is very true, that the problem to be solved in these institutions is that of leaving to the passions such a degree of activity, as will allow an ample developement of our moral powers, without endangering the public tranquillity. But the play of the passions is included in the idea of liberty; and it does not appear very necessary to analyse this idea. The question then will revert to that of the union of liberty with order. And if the authoress wished to inquire what was the predominant passion in the character of each nation; as she would have explained this character by its institutions, the passion would have appeared merely contingent. In any way the passions would have been sufficiently foreign to the subject of this part, or would have been connected with it by a too metaphysical refinement. Still

the discussion of these various questions by examples from history, as Madame de Staël intended, would have been extremely interesting.

When she renounced her original plan, she condensed, in an introduction, the substance of the work she had first projected. This fragment, which at the time strongly attracted the attention of thinking minds, exhibits in fact a stupendous mass of ideas. It is an unexplored mine, in which immense treasures will be found by whoever shall work it.

## *Of Literature, considered in its Connexion with social Institutions.*

Four years elapsed between the publication of the *Influence of the Passions* and that of *Literature considered.* During this interval a happy revolution in the mind of Madame de Staël seems to have been effected. Her opinions remained the same, but the current of her thoughts was changed. Her ideas were matured by reflection, a course of study alleviated the pressure of misfortune, and her mind

resumed its elasticity. Already her life becomes all futurity; and as the present does not answer her wishes, she steers with full sails toward a distant glory; her necessity of hope is diffused over the world at large. She believes that the human mind enriches itself with the wealth of ages. According to her, generations succeed not each other in vain, and a better order of things is gradually advancing, the principal features of which the prophetic eye of genius can distinguish. The state of commotion and anarchy ceases to appear to her a useless evil, when she considers it as a crisis, that must lead to a happier condition; and more especially when she attributes it to the inevitable resistance, which principles long misunderstood, or laid aside among speculative truths, experience, when we come to apply them to real life. But it is necessary that an examination of the past should justify this favourable augury: it must be proved that the advance of knowledge has been real, that it has been constant in spite of vicissitudes, and that we can trace the law of the moral improvement

of the human race through the obscurity of time. This is what is undertaken by Madame de Staël.

Her analytical turn of mind was peculiarly adapted to such a task, and her brilliant imagination could not fail to spread a charm over it. The difficulty of following the irregular course of civilization, and explaining its inequalities, its temporary interruptions, and its occasional retrograde appearances, with that of pursuing to one common result the various facts recorded in history, prodigious as these difficulties were, did not deter her; and she has almost always successfully surmounted them, perhaps without having estimated their magnitude. The same talent of observation, with which she surveyed the emotions of the heart, is applied to all the intellectual faculties, and all the results of their activity. She considers institutions, manners, and literature, in their mutual relations to each other; unravels the numerous and delicate threads, that connect the state of society with that of philosophy and religion; and shows how writers, who are al-

ways influenced by the character of their nation, react on that character itself. It is a grand idea, that of following the progress of the human mind through the course of ages, assigning to every great event, and to every great man, the share they respectively had in this progress.

We cannot avoid being singularly struck with the vastness of intellect displayed in this work. It is not, like the majority of good books of this class, an elegant abstract of received opinions, relieved by two or three new comparisons. Neither is it one of those systematic compositions, in which an author, viewing all objects on a particular side, may have certain novel conceptions, but at length fatigues us by the repetition of the same kind of examination. Every thing, it is true, is directed towards one end; but the course of Madame de Staël has nothing forced, nothing laborious: her point of view is just, vast, and impartial. She considers every subject, as if she were the first who had studied it: she sees things in the great: she contemplates them with a penetrating eye, with the eye of benevolence, that discovers a num-

ber of unexpected and pleasing relations. It is astonishing, that she coincides as she does with the writers of the new German school, whose works she had not then seen. An equal taste for every thing that exalts sensibility, and animates the imagination, led her into the same track.

Many opinions, which have since become subjects of discussion among critics, are displayed for the first time in this book. In it we find the origin of almost every thing that we have since read; and it is obvious, that it has been used oftener than it has been quoted. Perhaps Madame de Staël did not endeavour at the time to make the most of what she advanced. An idea of great fertility, a sentiment that would afford a field for eloquence, is expressed clearly, but without enlarging on it. She feels interested in what she writes; she adheres to her opinions; but she does not appear to attach much importance to the property of her thoughts, and seems to have convinced herself, when she inculcates indifference to fame. There is a nobleness, a loftiness in this.

She had not yet obtained what she felt she merited; and is satisfied with marking the rank the public would be compelled to grant her. As she does not reckon on the public favour, she does not indulge in all her originality; and, in this book, she seems to me more distinguished by the superiority of her understanding, than by the keenness and warmth of her style.

The success of this work would have been as splendid in France as in other countries, had it appeared in times more favourable. But what a woman must she have been, who, at a time, when decisive events absorbed the general attention, could compose such a book! who, exiled, persecuted, treated unjustly by both parties, could bend her mind to subjects apparently foreign to political questions, and calmly connect them with the greatest of these! If Madame de Staël were supposed, from her discourse, to be incapable of moderation, it was because she was impartial with vehemence: in her writings, she is so without passion, and, in the present performance, almost without vivacity.

The introduction is intended to set in a strong light the importance of mental labours. The authoress points out the connexion of literature with virtue, liberty, and happiness. She proves, that the greatest literary beauties derive their source from the loftiest morality: that good taste is allied to sound reason, as genius is to the exaltation of the ardent and generous faculties. In fine, Madame de Staël speaks feelingly of the consolation that certain writings have bestowed on the unfortunate for ages. She contemplates all the suffering and distinguished persons that ever lived as an illustrious society not interrupted by death; and, feeling herself already a member of it, she prepares for the unfortunate yet to come the benefit of this intercourse of souls, which she herself has maintained with the unfortunate of times past.

One half of the work is devoted to an examination of the past and the present, and the other to a prospect of the future. In the first, the authoress has determined the cha-

racter of every nation during the various periods of its history, and that of its most distinguished writers. Thus she passes rapidly in review the whole body of existing literature, and the influence which authors, institutions, climates, religions, and manners, have had on it. The entire spirit of the past is revealed to us in this manner, for there has never *been* any thing important in the active world, but what is reflected in the literary.

Madame de Staël had an uncommon faculty of bringing forward the most characteristic feature of any object. In all her delineations one idea stands prominent, but truth is never sacrificed to the desire of giving that idea importance. It is a focus that gives to the minuter observations that unity, without which they would be uninteresting; but these observations are not on this account the less just and impartial. She begins with making known to us what is. She describes with precision the character of a people, of a period, of a writer, noticing every remarkable singularity; and then she so clearly

explains why it is thus, that we conclude with finding that perfectly natural, at which we had been most astonished.

Undoubtedly some of the assertions of Madame de Staël may be disputed; and to this she is frequently exposed, when she deviates from the opinions of the learned. But this relates to judgment, not to facts; and we must necessarily revise our judgment of the ancients, in proportion as our points of comparison with them become more numerous. Viewing antiquity in a manner peculiar to herself, Madame de Staël obliges us to think anew on subjects, that seem to have exhausted the meditations of the human mind. When an important subject is worn out, is it not fortunate, that some one has revived it? Does not the writer, who gives colour to the pale shades of history, merit our gratitude? That error is to be dreaded, is obvious; but ignorance is also a cause of error, and we are eternally ignorant of what makes no impression. By dint of scrupulousness with respect to truth, we remain strangers to truth itself. We do not think ourselves safe from the

imagination of an author unless when he tires us, but forgetfulness soon devours the fruits of languid study.

According to her system of the happy effects of time, Madame de Staël could not avoid giving the Romans the superiority over the Greeks: and nothing is more novel or more striking, than the manner in which she points out the peculiar merit of the Roman literature.

What beauty of thought and expression is displayed, for instance, in the following reflections: "They [the Greeks] possessed not that sentiment, that deliberate will, that national spirit, that devoted attachment to their country, by which the Romans were distinguished. The Greeks were destined to give the first impulse to literature and the fine arts. The Romans have caused the world to bear the stamp of their genius. The history of Sallust, the letters of Brutus, the works of Cicero, present to our minds ideas, that have an irresistible effect on them. We feel the power of their intellect pervade the beauty of their style: we see the

man in the writer, the nation in the man, and the whole world at the feet of that nation."

This superiority of the least ancient writers is the point, that has been most contested with Madame de Staël. But it must be remembered, in the first place, that we have no right to object Homer and the ancient poets to her, since she has excepted the imagination from the faculties susceptible of improvement; and next, that, since she considers literature in its bearings on the institutions of society, she could not but view it in its most serious light. She has regarded it as the expression of popular sentiments, as the depository of the thoughts that decide the condition of nations, rather than a collection of the splendid sallies of the mind. Thus in her eyes the beauties of style are eclipsed by the grandeur of the writer's views, the universality of his judgment, the philosophical analysis of the heart, and in short all those qualities, that are long before they are unfolded in society.

The second volume is filled with advice to the writers of free states, and consequently

treats, with respect to France, of its future literature. This part enjoyed great reputation at the time, and perhaps it is in fact the most brilliant, because its subject is as new as its ideas. It must inspire a peculiar interest at present, when the hopes conceived by Madame de Staël are revived on a more solid foundation, and we already see her predictions half realized. It is true, we do not find in it that mixture of facts and ideas, that is so pleasing to some minds; but its merit is of a higher order. This part aims directly at the great object of all the writings, if not of the whole life of Madame de Staël; the desire of regulating and extending the influence of liberty. The analysis of general ideas is not less delicate and precise; and thus the authoress distinguishes with perfect sagacity the elements of which literary glory should be composed in a free state. It is true, she speaks of a republic: but it is apparent, that to the mind of Madame de Staël this species of government was but an accidental form of liberty. All that she says is equally applicable to a limited monarchy, and often with more

advantage. France is always her object; though the sad comparison of what it was, and what she had in view, impelled her incessantly to the ideal delineation of a great, free, enlightened, generous people, whose manners were in harmony with their institutions. Not unfrequently does her independent pen satirize the men of the day. The ambitious, the timid, the flatterers of power, every species of vanity, every greediness that presented itself to her eyes, are painted in lively colours.

The particularly spirited chapter entitled, *On Taste, on Urbanity of Manners, and their literary and political Influence,* is itself a delicate and keen censure of the tone of literature, and even of society, prevailing at the period when she wrote. The inconveniences of excessive refinement, and the most punctilious attention to elegance, are contrasted with those of vulgarity. She shows, that real talent is never obliged to sacrifice either strength or good taste. In all her criticisms, Madame de Staël equally anathematizes elegance destitute of ideas, and ideas disfigured by unsuitableness of expression.

They who wish to see herself in her writings, will find the chapter entitled, *Of Women who cultivate Letters*, extremely interesting. In her manner of treating this question, which is almost personal, we perceive how she generalized her own feelings. She observed in herself those emotions, so delicate that they seem peculiar to the individual, and then discovers them to be the necessary consequence of certain situations in life. I cannot resist the inclination to transcribe the passage, where she proves, that the fame which excites envy is in general a misfortune to those, who live only to the affections.

"The appearance of malevolence makes women tremble, however distinguished they may be. Courageous in misfortune, they are the reverse when exposed to enmity. They are exalted in imagination, but their character remains feeble and timorous. Most women, whose superior faculties have inspired them with the thirst of renown, resembled Herminia armed for the fight. The warriors see the casque, the lance, the waving plume: they expect to meet strength; they attack with

violence; and the first stroke pierces the heart."

It was impossible not to applaud the writer of such a work, but her system was strongly attacked. The perfectibility of the human race has always been the subject of many disputes; and it must be confessed, that the very term conveys an erroneous idea at the first aspect. To prevent all ambiguity, we should recollect what is meant by those, who have maintained this doctrine without exaggeration. The following are the words of Madame de Staël:—

"I do not mean to say, that the moderns have greater intellectual powers than the ancients; but merely, that the mass of ideas of every kind is increased in the course of ages."

In the same manner with respect to morality, we know well, that the human heart will always be composed of the same elements: but who will venture to say, that a particular system of education, or of social organization, may not render its dispositions, perpetual as they are, productive of better effects?

Literature perhaps does not afford the best station for defending the perfectibility of the human species. Of the works of the various ages of antiquity, those of transcendent merit alone could come down to us, and these are little adapted for comparison. Extraordinary talents appear to differ in kind, rather than in degree; and they draw our attention so much to the writer, that we do not take into account what he owes to the age in which he lived. Besides, when we speak of literature, it is difficult to set aside works of imagination, and the extreme lustre of ancient poetry attracts our thoughts in spite of ourselves. The remarks of Madame de Staël are not the less just; but the extreme delicacy of the subject matter, added to the interference of different literary tastes, tends to prevent her producing complete conviction.

It is when we consider history as a whole, that we see clearly what we have gained by the course of time. Idolatry has been overturned in Europe, and shaken throughout the world. Slavery, villanage, the trade in negroes, have

given way in succession to the influence of Christianity; not by this religion having stirred up the oppressed, but by its disarming the oppressors. A patient and resigned morality has been found incompatible with servitude, and the chains not yet broken have appeared to drop of themselves. Other motives less pure have served the cause of humanity, abuses without number have been reformed, and the condition of the unfortunate has been softened. Whether these changes have been produced by the progress of the human mind, or not, is of no concern in the question; it is sufficient, if they have produced this progress. The knowledge of the true interests of mankind has been acquired; and this knowledge is nothing else than the improvement of reason.

How many generations of ephemera are necessary, before these insects can ascertain, that the season has improved! How many times during the month of February, in a day of snow, of frost, of cutting winds, will these thinkers, born in the morning, deny the approach of spring! Such is the state of the question

among mankind. What is it to us, they say, whose life is but a moment, and a moment so frequently unhappy, that the course of ages advances slowly towards a better period? To the selfish it is of little consequence undoubtedly, and of little too, though from nobler motives, to the Christian, who aspires after eternity: yet how can we neglect such a glorious hope? how can we avoid embracing a doctrine, which alone holds out a useful object to superior minds, gives a real value to thought, and attributes a beneficent course to Providence in the government of human affairs?

All the objections, to which Madame de Staël's book could give rise, were collected, soon after its publication, in two articles in the *Mercure de France*. These articles, particularly remarkable for their style, have been much quoted. And though an asperity towards Madame de Staël personally, as much as towards her writings, is perceptible in them, they maintain those forms of politeness and elegance of manner, which a lady cannot but acknowledge, even though they are an advantage to her ad-

versary. Blows given with due caution are but so much the more sure; but here they have not been mortal: and though Madame de Staël rejected the advice gallantly expressed, to content herself with speaking, instead of writing, she has recovered from them. She was not insensible to the attack, however; and though she had never before replied to any criticism, she indirectly repelled this in a preface added to a second edition.

This reply is full of wit, elegance, and mildness. Madame de Staël justifies herself completely with respect to the facts; and, after having defended her opinions anew with vivacity and warmth, she gives an evident proof of that goodness, which prevented her believing the existence of hatred: for, while La Rochefoucault advises us to contemplate future enemies in the present objects of our affection, she could not avoid considering as a future friend every man of distinguished talents of whom she had reason to complain.

Since that time, the ideas scattered through that book have not proved fruitless. The fine

talents of Mr. de Chateaubriant have made proselytes to this system, when he ascribes exclusively to Christianity that progress, which Madame de Staël had included, along with Christianity itself, among the proofs of the perfectibility of the human mind. This doctrine then has imperceptibly established itself in the judgment of most people, without their being perfectly reconciled to the terms, in which it was first promulgated. This gave Madame de Staël little concern. Always carried forward by her understanding, she gave up disputed phrases, sure of incessantly finding new forms, in which to clothe the same fundamental opinions.

## *Delphine.*

A genius all fire and freedom, like that of Madame de Staël, could not obtain its full scope in philosophical writings; it could not be otherwise than difficult to her, to subject to

rigorous trammels a mind with so much vivacity as hers; and it is, perhaps, when her superiority is involuntarily displayed, that we acknowledge it with most pleasure. All those brilliant creations of the moment, those thoughts suggested by the occasion, could receive a durable existence only in a work of fiction; and it was necessary that her imagination should evoke the theatre of the world, to recall the ideas with which society had inspired it. The variable form of a novel in letters, afforded a natural place for her most stable ideas, as well as for her most fugitive thoughts; and in particular furnished her ardent and feeling heart with the means of pouring itself out unrestrained. No one is conscious of possessing that power of eloquence, without wishing to exert it. There is a happiness, dangerous perhaps, but still there is a happiness, in these powerful emotions, at once calmed and fixed by venting them in words; and this enjoyment alone would be a sufficient reward of genius. The passion susceptible of the most dramatic effect, that of which all the faithful delineations are marked with beauty, that which resembles generosity, devotedness,

adoration even, was also the most tempting for Madame de Staël to delineate.

A melancholy turn of thought pervaded her youth: she profoundly lamented the lot of women; and more particularly pitied those, who were endued with eminent faculties, when denied the happiness of wedded love, in her eyes of all the greatest. It appeared to her in this case equally difficult for them to confine themselves within the narrow limits of their fate, or to overstep these limits without exposing themselves to pungent sorrows. This idea, which might be embodied in a novel in a variety of forms, naturally led to the picture of a woman at once highly gifted and unhappy, swayed by her affections, ill guided by the independence of her mind, and suffering through her most amiable qualities.

Such a heroine was wonderfully well suited to Madame de Staël. Under the slight veil of this fictitious personage, she felt herself freed from personal responsibility; and in expressing a number of sentiments, that were half her own, she retained all the vivacity of her impressions, without thinking herself obliged to

criticise them. The differences between Delphine and herself are intentional. She has not given her heroine that quick penetration, which enabled her to foresee every thing, or that firmness of mind, by means of which she supported what she had not sought to avoid. Delphine foresees nothing, and suffers from every thing. Prompt to seize the slightest shades of feelings and ideas, she comprehends nothing of vanity or interest; and this very ignorance gives her character a tint of purity. She engages in the conflict of life with the simple hope of disarming the world by imperturbable benevolence, and by the sacrifice of self on all occasions: accordingly, the punishment inflicted by society on a confiding and ingenuous mind is depicted in a superior manner in this work.

But with a thousand external differences, there is an intimate similitude between the authoress and the heroine of the novel. The resemblances are the stronger, because they are involuntary. Corinna is the ideal picture of Madame de Staël; Delphine is the reality during

her youth. Accordingly, every movement is spontaneous in this personage, who seems formed by art. Delphine is a living being, yet a unique. In her we find goodness by inspiration, an instinctive devotedness, a native delicacy and generosity; and these qualities, combined with something infantile or wild in the impetuosity of her feelings, resemble so little those given to fictitious characters, and so seldom those of real life, that it seems as if she actually existed, and were the only person so formed.

It is the charmingness however, the natural virtues, of Delphine, which render her imprudences and errors insupportable to us. We are hurt, we are vexed, because we love her. She is so thoroughly endeared to us, that we are afraid of participating in her faults; and we are eager to censure her, for fear of becoming her accomplice. We are not a whit the more pleased with her for not being completely guilty, since she is sufficiently so to be unpardonable. We continually forget, that she is held up as an example to deter us from treading in her steps; and if, holding dangerous opinions,

she had been guilty of less errors, if she had expiated them less severely, then would the work have deserved to be condemned.

The interest excited by this novel is very strong; and I am not sure, that it is not most so in the least stormy situations. Perhaps genius is more remarkable where it is exerted unconsciously, and the author and reader are not aware beforehand of what is about to come. Madame de Staël was better fitted to depict love in its noblest exaltation than in its fury. Accordingly, as expressing the passion itself, the pieces written by Delphine at the moment, when she believes herself separated from Leonce for ever, are incomparably the finest. But what always charms us is the delineation of the nice shades of the most delicate movements of the heart. Among others, there are pairs of friendship so naturally and vividly expressed, that their effect is not diminished by that of more impetuous sorrows; and Delphine is so much the more affecting, as her tender heart is susceptible of being agitated by more innocent sentiments.

The characters in general are drawn with an extraordinary strength and accuracy of touch. That of Madame de Vernon is a masterpiece, absolutely new in its kind; and the portrait of that treacherous friend displays a fund of compassion and tenderness in the writer, that diffuses an irresistible charm over the picture. We are incessantly discovering Madame de Staël in this work. We there find her tastes, her opinions, her theory of the duties of friendship, of services, of gratitude, her pity for general suffering, her manner of considering existence, at once so vast and so minute. We discern her habit of analysing the various impressions and even the thoughts of ordinary minds; so that, when these characters in the romance come to display their motives, they do it with singular ingenuity. This is a slight inconsistency no doubt; but an inconsistency extremely agreeable, that reminds us of the pleasure of those conversations, in which Madame de Staël amused herself by describing other persons, when she would exhibit imbecility in such witty terms, as to produce the most delightful contrast. The style too, which has

been criticised,' is very frequently that of the unrivalled conversation of Madame de Staël. It is true, when she was speaking, her lively eye, her expressive attitude, her animated and caustic tone, gave a striking and particularly pleasing sense to certain words, to which she herself had given currency.

In reading this work, I confess, remembrances assail me too forcibly. I lose myself in a thousand resemblances, and in the emotions they excite. Events vanish from my eyes like the useless frame of a picture, and I see the ground of the idea. It is of the past, it is of life, alas! it is of death, that Delphine is no longer a fiction. The reading of it is a painful dream, in which a thousand images are retraced; in which every thing I have known is displayed, transformed, confounded, under a hundred fugitive appearances; in which a secret agony, the sinistrous indication of what I have lost, mingles itself with an illusion too pleasing. It was equally beneath the character and the genius of Madame de Staël, to introduce real persons into this fanciful picture: yet which of

her old friends can peruse such a work, without beholding those beings, all more or less distinguished, who lived in her existence, and contended for her affections, passing before them like shadows? without beholding that society now dispersed, radii detached from a centre now annihilated, persons separated by differences of every kind, and who perhaps would be no longer suited to each other in life, but who must for ever agree in their regrets?

Incapable, therefore, of confining myself to the novel in this production, I will speak only of its effects on others. They discerned in it rather the vigorous shoot than the maturity of talent. The fire of youth was united with that of imagination; and, though it contained the elements of every kind of distinction, as Madame de Staël for the first time here gave up the reins to her genius, yet, as she had offended the most irritable of all things in the world, political passions, she could scarcely escape censure. In consequence, *Delphine* was warmly admired, and as warmly attacked. Madame de Staël received her share of literary censure very

gayly; but they who censured her work on the score of immorality gave her real pain. On this head she was extremely sensitive with regard to *Delphine*, and always asserted the innocence of her intentions in writing it. As she composed a work expressly to disavow the sort of apology for suicide, with which she was reproached, it is unnecessary to resume this subject. But I may here notice, that, though she felt extreme repugnance to employ herself on any of her old productions, she has also written "*Reflections on the moral Design of Delphine.*" In this piece, which deserves to be published, she examines every question relating to that romance, referring it, as usual with her, to general principles. Thus, after having shown by her very motto, "A man ought to be capable of braving the public opinion—a woman should submit to it," that she disapproves the conduct both of Leonce and of Delphine, she endeavours to explain why we are all impelled by natural inclination towards persons of sensibility and a romantic turn, while society as a body passes judgment on them with great

rigour. Her moral purpose, as she declares, was twofold. She says, on the one hand, to eminent women, "Respect opinion, since whatever you have of good and noble may be wounded by it, and it will pursue you even in the very hearts of those you love:" and, on the other hand, to public opinion, "Be not inexorable towards those extraordinary beings, who are extremely susceptible of unhappiness, and who constitute the ornament and charm of life."

We may conceive, that a lesson of severity, and a lesson of indulgence, reciprocally enfeeble each other: yet it is very true, that both are required. They are commonly the base and odious passions, that are inveterate against exalted qualities: and perhaps it was necessary, that the punishment of the weak and imprudent should be entrusted to malignity, for pure virtue would never be sufficiently severe.

If, contrary to the intention of Madame de Staël, this work will afford ground for some censures, it must be ascribed to the influence of the time when she wrote. This, as well as that of the fictitious scene, belongs to the revolutionary

period. Now at that time different causes combined to heat the imagination of writers. Frightful examples of cruelty, baseness, and selfishness, turned the full tide of their admiration towards the generous and lofty qualities; forcible situations in real life excited corresponding ones in fictions; and, in fine, when the structure of society was falling to pieces on all sides, it was scarcely possible that the idea of great involuntary sentiments, and the devotedness that accompanies them, should not acquire an ascendancy in the minds of authors over the idea of those ties, which too often originated from social fitness. Conclusions more clearly drawn, a censor introduced among the characters, would easily have made the moral of the work sufficiently prominent: but Madame de Staël was averse to the contrivances of the art, and did not think these means necessary. Yet she has altered the catastrophe of Delphine, "though not," she says, "in submission to the opinion of those who maintain, that suicide should be excluded from dramatic compositions; for an author does not express his own private

opinions in assigning particular actions to the characters of his piece." It must be allowed, however, notwithstanding the wild and tragic beauty of the first catastrophe, that the new one, and particularly an admirable letter of the dying Delphine, leave an impression on the mind in every respect better.

Here finishes the second period of the literary labours of Madame de Staël. It realized the hopes given in the first, and laid the foundation of her future reputation. Her writings had powerfully attracted the attention of intelligent foreigners, while in France very imperfect justice was done them. The grand and novel ideas, that sparkled in every part of them, did not compensate, in the eyes of certain critics, for some slight incorrectnesses, a few neologisms, and occasionally a little obscurity. Madame de Stael was considered as a person of extraordinarily brilliant conversation; but in literature she was still classed with those witty authors, the faults of whose style have excluded them from the first rank. She has appealed from such a decision, but this severity was advan-

tageous to her: her talents had sufficient strength to render themselves complete in all points. Hitherto she had not acquired such a mastery of language, as to be capable of expressing her thoughts in all their infinite gradations, without having recourse to phrases unsanctioned by use. What is advantageous to mediocrity, is detrimental to real superiority. A mind of great originality is mistaken for a capricious mode of writing; and it is when the language of Madame de Staël most resembles that of all the world, that we most clearly perceive hers to be no every-day talents.

## WRITINGS OF MADAME DE STAËL.

### *Period the Third.*

It was toward the end of 1803, after having published *Delphine*, that Madame de Staël, exiled by the tyranny of one individual, as she had been before by that of several, made her first journey into Germany. There she found her reputation greater than she had expected.

Men of genius, and of genius analogous to her own, received her with transport; sovereigns contended for her; and a friendly society applauded her talents, her political conduct, and her enthusiastic regard for her father. There too she had the advantage of fixing in her house a distinguished writer, Mr. Schlegel, who was equally agreeable to her for the resemblance and the differences in their way of thinking, while his praises as well as his contradictions incessantly stimulated her mind. This year was prodigal of pleasures, of success, of new ideas to Madame de Staël; but it reserved for her one dreadful blow, the loss of her father.

I shall return again to this disastrous event, and shall consider it here only as the period of a fine developement of the talents of Madame de Staël. She had already felt misfortune. The crimes of the revolution, the ingratitude of men towards her father, their injustice to herself, and other pains besides, had rent her heart. But in those griefs, for which we can blame others, or even ourselves, there is something of asperity and irritation, that prevents the full

expansion of the heart. She had sometimes that bitter and satiric vein, which indeed is also a mean of success; but the great beauty of her genius was lofty and pathetic inspiration. A sorrow that came from heaven, that was in the order of nature, that was allied to religious sentiment, would affect her mind in a manner that must be called happy, if we consider the highest perfection as the greatest happiness. Her thoughts incessantly fixed on the truly admirable qualities of Mr. Necker, the ardent desire of becoming to his children what he had been to her, her constant practice of reading with them valuable works of religion and morality, in which sacred laws seemed inculcated on them by their father, with the double authority of his life and of his death, all concurred to produce on her that solemn and profound impression, so well adapted to give a beneficial turn to her thoughts, and a character of grandeur to her writings.

From that period, her religious opinions were more decided, her sentiments of piety more constant and more active. The vagueness of a poetic

belief ceased to satisfy her heart: she required a firm faith in that promise of immortality, which alone saved her from despair; in a word, she had need of being a Christian because her father died as a Christian. Those illusions of tender hearts, which a religion so pure pleasingly favours or tolerates; the idea of an intercourse with friends who are no more, that they still watch over us, and that hereafter perhaps they will obtain for us, as a part of their own reward, the happiness of a re-union with them: all these hopes from that period filled the heart of Madame de Staël, and supported her in that long and severe struggle, during which she repelled the terrors of death, by the thought that she was going to rejoin her father.

Such were the sentiments that dictated that admirable piece on the private life of Mr. Necker, which she prefixed to the manuscripts of his which she published. Among those friends of Madame de Staël, who have publicly paid homage to her memory, a writer now highly celebrated, Mr. Benjamin Constant, has sig-

nalized the extraordinary merit of this tract by saying, that none of the works of Madame de Staël can make us so well acquainted with her character.

In fact it has in it something altogether peculiar. It is perhaps the only time, that we have seen talents of the first rank, contending with real sorrow, paint it involuntarily. She is so far from endeavouring to produce any effect by her grief, that she is not even conscious of expressing it: there is an entire forgetfulness, I will go farther, there is a complete sacrifice of self in this piece. She places herself below her mother, because she would exalt Mr. Necker in the object of his choice; she endeavours to make herself appear volatile and inconsiderate, in order that, if ever she incur blame, it should not recoil on her father; in fine, she goes so far as to insinuate, that her thoughts were not naturally very profound, by way of leading us to presume, that the impressions he produced on her mind would have been much stronger on that of another. The sorrows of her heart pierce through every word; yet she displays an

inconceivable variety of tones, of means, of resources, when she would make us feel the various merits of her father. Fearing on his account, that her sorrow would be tiresome to the reader, she tries a thousand different chords; she reasons, to convince him; she is seducing, to disarm him; she even endeavours to amuse, in order to secure his attention. It is by sudden bursts that her feelings appear; but, it is obviously her full intention to maintain a noble reserve. The fear of defeating her purpose by exaggeration continually haunts her. Something of constraint, of timidity, shows a painful mistrust of her means of persuasion; and her abrupt phrases, seeming as if uttered by one out of breath, prove, that as she wrote she blushed with apprehension of not hitting the right tone, and of injuring the object of her adoration.

One who has been acquainted with Madame de Staël and her father, who knows that they are contained in the same grave, cannot reflect without tears on the profound affection that such a work both evinces and justifies.

## *Corinna, or Italy.*

After having, in some degree, eased her heart by this homage, Madame de Staël set out for Italy. Still overwhelmed with grief, this journey held out to her no agreeable prospect: besides, the attractions it might possess, were not of that kind to which she believed herself most awake. Hitherto, she had admired nothing but intellect, had studied nothing but books and the human heart. Long banished from the brilliant theatre of the pleasures and success of her early years, she had deeply regretted her absence from Paris previous to her misfortune, and Paris alone still seemed capable of interesting her. Little acquainted with the enjoyments of the fine arts, she had been but feebly affected by the aspect of nature. The beauties of the country were, in her eyes, little more than the decorations of exile, the frigid attire of an insipid abode; and she had taken a sort of aversion to the lakes, the mountains, the glaciers of Switzerland, the view of

which had been held out to her as some indemnification for her exile. Nothing exclusive of sentiment or thought had any value in her eyes. Her disposition was already changed in many respects when she set out for Italy: her father was dead, without the French having done him justice: the French still pleased her, but at this period she undoubtedly loved them less. Certain of feeling sorrow every where, the choice of abode had become more indifferent to her, and it was natural for her to prefer one that brought to her mind no painful recollections. In this journey she experienced a degree of consolation, which her affecting superstition ascribed to the intercession of her father. The beautiful sky, and happy climate of Italy, acted upon her unconsciously. Her softened heart expanded to pleasing emotions; and perhaps it was necessary for it to lose a portion of its activity, to enable external objects to make their full impression on her. What they did produce was grand, powerful, unexpected; and she fancied she beheld nature and the arts for the first time, when they offered themselves

to her eyes in their most splendid magnificence.

The developement of this new sentiment was unquestionably promoted by the society of Mr. Schlegel. This gentleman's knowledge of the fine arts, and his ingenious yet poetical mode of giving an account of their effects, succeeded in interesting Madame de Staël. By a secret analogy, the admiration of art awakened in her bosom that of nature, and the copies led her to the original.

Perhaps genius is a gainer by these tardy impressions, which effect a sudden revolution in a mind already much exercised. If Madame de Staël had been sensible of the charms of rural objects from her infancy, her first works would have been enriched with a greater number of pictures, but she would never have written *Corinna*.

In literature strictly so called, and out of the sphere of politics, *Corinna* is the master-piece of Madame de Staël. It is the shining, the immortal work, that first acquired her a rank among great writers. It is a work of genius,

in which two different objects, a romance and a picture of Italy, are intimately amalgamated; The two ideas evidently originated at the same time; we feel, that separately they would not have seduced the authoress, and would not have expressed her thoughts. Hence it is, that amid the richest variety of forms and colours, one harmonious tint and happy proportions produce the most delightful combination.

*Corinna* is at once a work of art and a work of feeling; a poem, and a display of the heart. A disposition ardently impassioned, and at the same time tender and melancholy, pervades it in every part; and there is not a line in it written without emotion. Madame de Staël has divided herself as it were between her two principal personages; to the one she has imparted her eternal regrets, to the other her new-born admiration. Corinna and Oswald are enthusiasm and sorrow, and both are herself.

The melancholy given to Lord Nelvil is a fine idea in the work. Hence it is that the second part, so gloomy as a whole, is not discordant with the first; and forms a ground-work

pleasingly mournful, which sets off every object, and the brilliant figure of Corinna in particular, with singular lustre. Hence too it is, that a more perfect charm is diffused over Corinna herself. Pity is intermingled with every thing she feels. It is not merely an enamoured female, who endeavours to captivate a beloved object; it is a benevolent genius, who comes to assuage grief. Every thing is tenderness, even what dazzles and astonishes. It seems as if couplets infinitely varied were sung to an enchanting air, the theme of which is notwithstanding sorrowful and piercing. Nothing, however, can be more animated, more lively, frequently even more gay, than the colouring of the work; and it is because life is there represented with energy in its joys as well as in its sorrows, that the whole fiction is so beautiful and striking.

The first part, Italy shown by the hand of Love, is a continued scene of enchantment. Corinna celebrates all the wonders of art in making Oswald acquainted with the greatest of wonders, Rome stamped with the genius of so

many ages, Rome that has triumphed over the world and over time. She sings nature fertile and magnificent as it is in the South, the monuments of times past in their august melancholy, the heroes, the poets, the citizens, who are no more. Whatever history furnishes of great, whatever the present can inspire of pleasing, of striking, and occasionally of comic, to an observing mind, are found united in her words. To the original views of a youthful imagination, she adds a knowledge of all that has been thought on the objects of which she speaks. She knows what has been the way of thinking respecting them of the ancients, of the artists, of the middle ages, and of different modern nations: and she explains and contrasts all these points of view with the graceful animation of a young female, whose first object is to please, and to inspire love. Real information is conveyed to us by a person of sensibility, who always addresses herself to the heart.

The authoress has skilfully thrown into shade the beginning of Lord Nelvil's journey, in order

to throw all the light on that superb scene, which is the real commencement of the work. Overwhelmed by grief for the loss of his father, Oswald, or Lord Nelvil, had entered Rome without observing any thing; when the next morning he is awakened by a brilliant sunshine, the sound of trumpets, and the discharge of cannon. The muse of Italy, Corinna, an *improvisatrice*, a musician, a painter, and a charming woman, is proceeding to the Capitol to be crowned. The whole city is in motion: the festival of genius is celebrated by an entire people. We share all the feelings of Oswald, when he follows involuntarily the splendid car of Corinna, when we fancy we see that lovely countenance, on which were depicted goodness and simplicity of heart, united with the noblest enthusiasm. We share his emotion, when, mixed with the crowd in the Capitol, he perceives that his fine figure, his mourning garb, and perhaps his expression of melancholy, have caught the attention of Corinna, that she is softened while looking at him, and that she has already found it necessary to

change the subject of her song; and add pathetic expressions to her hymn of triumph. But Oswald's character appears through all the trouble he feels. We perceive, that the idea of his country possesses paramount sway over him. When, at coming out of the Capitol, the crown of Corinna drops off, Oswald restores it to her, and she thanks him in two English words; it is the inimitable national accent, that thrills through his inmost soul. At first he had been attracted, he is now struck to the heart; we know that it is the sensitive chord; and thus the novel is announced, and this magnificent exordium includes the secret of the remainder.

The improvisations of Corinna, which are supposed to be translated from the Italian in the work, are a very brilliant ornament to it: yet I know not whether their acknowledged brilliancy be much superior in attraction to the other discourses of Corinna. Every thing that she utters is ravishing. In the circle of friends, by which she is surrounded, she always excites the most lively enthusiasm. Her words,

ever expected with impatience, are always applauded with justice. Every body says, "Listen to Corinna, and you will be enchanted:" Corinna speaks, and in fact she does enchant us. It never once enters into our thoughts, that Madame de Staël praises herself in extolling what she has written; so completely do we find, that there is sufficient reason for this praise. It is a difficulty of the highest degree for an author, to announce a prodigy of wit, and always to keep his word: to prepare us for astonishment, and astonish us nevertheless. An exertion without example, if the copiousness and facility of her vein did not exclude the idea of exertion, to impress us with that of miracle.

This multitude of eloquent passages and enchanting pictures does not render the fiction less interesting, as the authoress has skilfully introduced the digressions only where the progress of the action is suspended, when the reader is even afraid of its resuming its course, and when he enjoys a moment of tranquillity so much the more, because he is sensible of an approaching storm.

The fate of Corinna is involved in mystery. She speaks all languages, she unites the accomplishments of every country, but no one knows where she was born. Oswald, who has no conception of happiness but that which is domestic, wishes to be united with her by the most sacred ties, but he first requires her confidence. The explanation, which Corinna puts off from day to day, is dreaded by the reader himself. He delights in those walks, those interesting excursions, which she is continually proposing to Oswald, in order to distract the curiosity of the heart by that of the understanding. Happiness, but a happiness about to terminate, and the passion destined to survive it, breathe in the discourse of Corinna. The moment the fatal confession approaches, the more she seeks to stifle her own reflexions, and to intoxicate the man she loves with the highest enjoyments of poetry and the arts. It seems as if more brilliant colours illumined every object, in proportion as the heavens assumed a more threatening aspect; and that an extraordinary ray of light still pierces the

cloud, from which the thunder is ready to burst.

It is after having ascended Mount Vesuvius with Oswald, and taken a near view of the torrents of burning lava, that Corinna puts into the hands of Lord Nelvil the packet, in which she has written her history.

Never was there a more fatal concurrence of circumstances. Corinna is an Englishwoman, and was unable to endure the monotony of an English country life. Corinna was intended from infancy for the wife of Oswald himself; and the father of the latter, alarmed at the vivacity displayed at an early period in her tastes and ideas, had turned his thoughts to Lucilia, the younger sister of Corinna. Thus Oswald is wounded in his feelings both as an Englishman and as a son. He is hurt in what affects him most profoundly, in what is more deeply rooted in his breast than love itself.

From this moment the fiction assumes a different character, and the reader perceives, that nothing can ensue but separation or death. Thenceforward there is nothing in the inter-

course between Oswald and Corinna but severe conflicts, those rendings of the heart, that result from the opposition of sentiments equally vivid; nothing but that unevenness of conduct which is their natural consequence, and a reserve more distressing even than bursts of passion. Oswald must think of returning to his country, and the description of his stay at Venice with Corinna at the moment of separation has a melancholy beauty highly original. I shall pursue this sketch no farther. I cannot bring myself to retrace the terrible visit, that Corinna secretly pays to England, the disease of languor by which she is consumed, the marriage of Oswald with her sister, which she almost witnesses, her solitary return to Florence, the arrival of Oswald and Lucilia in that city, and lastly the farewell of Corinna to both; a farewell contained in a sublime hymn, truly the song of a dying swan, a never drying source of tears, that, alas! have no longer a fictitious subject.

The latter part of the work forms a complete contrast with the beginning. The most

gloomy tint pervades it; and it exhibits what we may term a fearful display of the talent of depicting grief. It is extraordinarily fertile of those nice shades which mark the degrees of sorrowful feeling, and fix, if I may be allowed the expression, the fugitive miseries of the heart. At first we perceive a slight diminution of happiness; next a vague and transient pain, assuming every moment a more decided character; then unhappiness in its greatest severity; and lastly despair, with its appearance of greater calmness, the despair of a being too gentle and too pious to resist, but too weak not to die. Astonishing and faithful picture, that compels us to acknowledge in the writer a capacity for suffering, not less uncommon than her genius*!

* The unfortunate queen of Prussia, the innocent victim of the calumnies of a man, who, when seated on the throne of the world, took a pleasure in insulting beauty and misfortune, said, that she was frequently obliged to leave off the perusal of Corinna, because she felt her heart wrung to such a degree; not so much with grief, as with that privation of happiness and hope, which reminded her so forcibly of her own fate.

Notwithstanding this profound sorrow, there is always a fine harmony in every picture. Corinna, unhappy, is still an inspired muse; and the enjoyment of the fine arts, the object of which is tragical, is never lost to the reader.

Perhaps an episodical intrigue, of which Paris is the theatre, should be excepted from this eulogium. This piece appears to me a little foreign to the style of the work; and whatever merit it may have, it is here out of place.

It has been said, that the character of Corinna has something in it too theatrical for probability. But it was not common nature that the authoress aimed to represent: it was the exalted character of a poetess; and a female endued with the spirit of poetry, when she is in love and unhappy, is always an *improvisatrice*. The consciousness of her talent, and of the admiration she excites, never forsakes her, and gives to the expression of her real sentiments a particularly vivid colouring. Madame de Staël, though with much more simplicity of character than her heroine, was more capable than any other person of conceiving such a modification

of human nature. It is this very inspiration, applied to external objects as well as to the affections of the heart, that makes the description harmonize with the romantic parts of the composition.

They who criticise this work as a novel, think the hero not sufficiently impassioned. But Corinna was not to be surpassed in any thing, not even in love; and it required a character totally different from hers, to hold its place by her side. That of Oswald is perfectly consonant to nature, and more particularly to English nature. How many of those beings exist, especially in colder climes, who regret by turns pleasure and austerity, who are swayed at once by their habits and the desire of emancipating themselves from them, and who are never so near the point of breaking with their passions or with their principles, as when we suppose they are just ready to yield to them! This character, which kept the unfortunate Corinna in a state of perpetual alarm, was perhaps precisely what was required, to fix her imagination, and render its impression more profound.

Every thing relating to the fine arts in the work is highly interesting and of great merit. There is an extreme freshness and vivacity in the impressions, yet we perceive in them an ingenious erudition. The most striking ideas of Winkelmann, those which other German authors have added to them, and the views of learned Italians, are brought forward by Corinna, and frequently seem revived in her in the form of inspiration. Corinna with her enthusiasm has all the tact of Madame de Staël. With her the most lively admiration always has its bounds. The phrase that expresses it marks its extent. She feels not only what there is, but what is wanting; yet without ceasing to enjoy what actually appears.

I know not whether Madame de Staël has been charged with painting herself in Corinna. Perhaps she was not without a wish of diminishing the prejudices too commonly entertained against great talents in women. Perhaps she was desirous of showing what she felt within herself, that the love of fame does not necessarily imply those faults, with which it is

commonly associated in the opinion of the world. She has, therefore, created a being similar to herself, a woman who unites the thirst of fame with profound sensibility, activity of imagination with constancy of heart, playfulness of conversation with that dignity of mind which imposes dignity of manners, and finally the utmost tenderness of the passions with the examination both of herself and others. And to the being thus conceived, she has given such reality, such a decided form in every one's eyes, that the fiction has served as a proof of the truth; and Corinna has made us acquainted at last with Madame de Staël.

Such a view, however, could only be secondary. We must not seek for an explanation of what is beautiful in itself. Corinna is the fruit of inspiration. It was a picture which had taken such strong hold of the imagination of the authoress, that she could not help tracing it, and it is the peculiarity of genius, to paint itself in its works.

What is remarkable in the construction of the fable is, that chance appears to have

no part in it; the incidents only serve to render the nature of things more prominent. Certainly no immutable law obliged the father of Oswald to refuse Corinna for a daughter-in-law; but we perceive this father is introduced only to represent the secret, the inevitable thoughts of Oswald himself; who is apprehensive, that a woman of celebrity is not fitted for the performance of obscure duties. Lucilia and Corinna too are general ideas: they are, England and Italy, domestic happiness and the pleasures of imagination, shining genius and modest and rigid virtue. The pleadings for and against these two kinds of existence are equally strong; the two opposite sides of life are seized with the same vivacity of conception; and a grand question is continually discussed in the work, without the reader's suspecting it, so irresistibly is he hurried on by the dramatic effect.

It is easy to conceive, that the fundamental idea of *Delphine* and of *Corinna* is the same. In both it is a woman endowed with superior faculties, who cannot confine herself to the

path prescribed by public opinion, and who soon falls a prey to the heaviest sorrows, because she has deviated from it. But on comparing these two productions, the superiority is every where in favour of *Corinna*. The heroine in *Delphine* is a woman of great wit, but she has not the excuse of prodigious mental powers. More scrupulous perhaps than Corinna, she places herself in a more equivocal situation; she neither possesses complete purity nor complete *éclât*, and nothing distracts the attention from the painful feeling she excites. Corinna presents herself with more grandeur. She has openly quarrelled with opinion; and in the classic land of Italy the oppression of society is not felt. She covets nothing but glory, and she obtains it. In the conflict of the passions too, there is nothing that degrades her. It is not that kind of struggle, which always lowers a woman a little, even when she is victorious in it. Her fate is marriage or despair, happiness or death; and there is dignity in this alternative. She is not struggling with remorse, or with humiliation; but with the

course of things, and with misfortune: and genius supports her in the struggle.

*Corinna* met with prodigious success. A work adapted to all; from which artists derived fresh enthusiasm, with new means of expressing it; in which the learned found ingenious comparisons, the traveller judicious hints, the critic delicate observations; where the coldest heart could not avoid giving way to emotions; and in fine where there was pleasure even for the satirical, in those national portraits so laughably characteristic; such a work compelled the suffrages of all, and commanded every one's praise. There was but one voice respecting it from one end of lettered Europe to the other; and the period of its appearance was every where an epoch *.

From that period Madame de Staël reaped

* I have been informed by my son, who was at Edinburgh, at the moment when, notwithstanding the war, a few copies of *Corinna* had reached that place, that it made an inconceivable noise in that enlightened city. The whole body of society there was electrified: metaphysicians, geologists, professors of every kind, stopped one another in the streets, to ask how

nothing but satisfaction from her labours. Under the name of Corinna envy had forgiven her; and she obtained what she sought, admiration mingled with sympathy, and I must own weak. It was particularly necessary to her to be interesting; and she was desirous that people should divine her sorrows. Accordingly, she herself has pointed out the path, to those who wished to praise her.

A natural candour, a certain modesty on several points, led her to reject all praise that did not belong to her, and even what she felt was due to her, she accepted as a gift.

This is perhaps the only one of Madame de Staël's works entirely unconnected with politics; yet its spirit did not suit a jealous ruler, who led men by their interests, and was an enemy to all enthusiasm but that of victory. He never forgave talents, except when he obtained

far they had got in the perusal of it. The picture of English manners was judged perfectly faithful; and it was said, that some little country town, the name of which Madame de Staël had never so much as heard, was grievously offended, because it supposed she had intended to turn it into ridicule.

from them that praise, by which talents abdicated their independence, and consequently their power. But to praise despotism, and him who employed its most odious means to obtain praise, was impossible to a noble mind.

Madame de Staël accordingly resigned herself to banishment; and, considering the distinguished men of every nation as her real countrymen, she returned in 1807 to Vienna, with a view of collecting fresh materials for the great work she was preparing, the Picture of Germany, in regard to morals, literature, and philosophy. Among the advantages she obtained from this journey, she herself reckoned, as by no means the least, the pleasure she felt in brightening the latter years of an amiable old gentleman, from whom she received the most flattering welcome. She promised the prince de Ligne to publish herself a part of the anecdotes he had collected, and usher them into the world by a preface; a circumstance that could not fail to ensure his literary success. The reception which this work met with was, as is well known, so favourable, that it increased and

was extended to a second, nay even to a third selection from the anecdotes, which Madame de Staël had omitted; so that the curiosity of the public was glutted, in order to ensure its being satisfied.

## *Germany.*

Italy might be sung, but Germany must be told. A country, where nothing is great but thought; where art, nature, even society, have nothing to strike the eye, or captivate the imagination; could not inspire an *improvisatrice.* Still there were immense stores for the understanding to collect. There was displayed to the observing eye of Madame de Staël a mode of seeing, of feeling, in short, of existing, altogether peculiar; and the number of new ideas she found in circulation among enlightened men required all her address to explain them, and place them in their true light. Laying aside, therefore, the borrowed garb of Corinna, she spoke in her own name; and appeared her-

self on the stage with her engaging vivacity. It was the most judicious step she could take. The didactic form did not require unity, and admitted all subjects. Accordingly, this work bears upon it the powerful stamp of each of the richly diversified talents of the authoress. To all the ardour of her mind, her piercing and original wit, her gaiety even, are joined a strength of intellect, a faculty of abstraction, that would not have been supposed to exist in combination with the poetic fire of her imagination. This work ranks unquestionably as high as the preceding, and is perhaps more extraordinary, as the performance of a woman. However, another Corinna was expected, and this produced a momentary dissatisfaction. The reader expected to be moved, though he could not see beforehand how this was to be effected. But Madame de Staël could not follow her own steps. She had elsewhere made the passions speak sufficiently; and, if the fire of her genius had not turned to other objects, she would never have attained her greatest glory.

There exists in her *Germany* a merit of the

higher order. It is a work profoundly moral and religious. In it virtue and religion are not introduced as means of producing an effect. They are not sonorous chords, that talents delight in causing to vibrate in the heart. There reigns throughout the whole composition a passionate desire to give force to regenerating principles, to vivify at once sentiment and imagination, by combating doctrines that paralyse both. Such are the motives that inspired Madame de Staël throughout this work. Here we find no recurrence to herself, no trace of any personal impulse. In her preceding writings, she was still occupied on herself. She paints her own fate under general colours; and derives from the idea of the sorrows inevitably attached to the lot of women that resignation, which enables her to support her own. There is nothing of this in her *Germany*. The sole object in it which she seeks and desires is *good;* that of literature, that of society, and that of the human mind. To point out the intimate and necessary connexion between the genius of

religion, and that of the fine arts and the higher philosophy, is the constant aim of the authoress.

But how is it, that so little encouragement is found in the pursuit of so laudable an end? Is there a secret concert between those who want to hear as little as possible of religion, and those who, by dint of scrupulosity, render the subject so delicate to handle, that by this very step they exclude it entirely? Certain pious persons would perhaps be less alarmed at a book altogether profane, provided it be innocent, than at one that exposes them to the danger of receiving worldly thoughts into the most sacred recesses of their hearts. Thus the mixture of fine arts and religion in this work has been blamed by a writer (Mrs. Hannah More), whom Madame de Staël herself reckons among the most distinguished ornaments of English literature. The motives of an author so estimable, and in general judicious, demand our respect; but we may venture to say, that she has not examined the question in all its bearings. For religion to exert its influence at all times, and on all

persons, it is necessary that the whole of life, with the arts and sciences which are its splendid *appanage*, be contemplated religiously. Unless religious thoughts be allied with all others, there will be a want of harmony in the mind, and of consistency in the conduct. If we do not feel that every thing comes from God, if the communication between the radii and their centre be intercepted, the idea of all others the most sublime, that of the Divinity, will be greatly confined, and for this very reason escape us.

Madame de Staël was deeply convinced of these truths, which she found already common in Germany, the country where most attempts have been made to bind up all the branches of human knowledge into one whole. No spectacle could be more interesting to her than that of a nation, where the reign of those opinions she had hitherto professed was solidly established—where she found her own ideas, on the one hand, applied in a thousand ways to real life; on the other, supported by the principles of a lofty philosophy. Nevertheless, she examines these ideas anew. She sees their incon-

veniences in the abuses occasionally made of them; and the strength of the impressions she unexpectedly receives affords her continual opportunities of rectifying her system.

Nothing in Germany, it must be confessed, appeared to her perfect. Books, the stage, the art of conversation, nothing was carried to a high degree of excellence: but every where there was warmth, life, emulation among the writers, benevolence in society. Every thing was to be hoped, but hope animated every thing. She seemed to breathe more freely, when she saw herself surrounded by men, who imposed no shackles on talents, no limits to thought, who were strangers to every kind of intolerance, and who welcomed genius as a child from heaven, without mistrust. The spirit that guided the writers led her to judge more favourably of their works; but she wished rather to see that spirit prevail in France, than to set up German literature as a model for the French to imitate. At a time when even men's thoughts appeared to be enslaved, she proclaimed the advantage of intellectual independ-

ance, as she did those of political liberty in her last work.

Many difficulties presented themselves in composing this work. When Germany is in question, pedantry, intricate metaphysics, or a spurious exaggerated sentimentality, is naturally expected. As Madame de Staël instantly discovered these faults wherever they existed, she would necessarily show, that she was incapable of being their dupe. Besides, the reader was armed beforehand against a multitude of ideas which she had to discuss; and the battle, already commenced on certain points, rendered national prejudices very intractable. But with the vivid sentiment of her own natural equity, she marches on through all these difficulties. She spares no one; yet it appears, that no one has reason to be offended; because she is superior to the subjects she discusses; because, reducing literary contests to their true value, she is honest enough to be the first to smile, when even her favourites lay themselves open to ridicule in some points; finally, because she still preserves the amiability

of her sex, and shows there is a desire to please even in her satirical strokes.

Accordingly, the Germans have taken in good part even her severest reproaches. They were making their first appearance on the stage, and wished to appear docile: and as Madame de Staël gave their literature precisely what it wanted, an European existence, they were more flattered than offended. But it was not so with the French. The vast renown of authors naturalised in every country, dramatic pieces acted on every stage, a language become throughout the whole world as a mother tongue to the cultivated class, had filled the French with a just pride; they were in every way at the summit of power, and to speak to them frankly was like speaking the truth to kings.

But it was precisely this, that set Madame de Staël at ease. She was naturally no friend to power, and her generosity prompted her to raise the reputation of a people unfortunate and misconceived. Still, notwithstanding this sentiment, notwithstanding the intoxication of enthusiasm which she inspired on the one hand, and the

persecution she experienced on the other, she was guilty of no injustice; and somewhat of an epigrammatic turn given to decisions equitable at bottom is all that the French have to lay to her charge.

It must be remembered, that, at the time when she wrote, France was in a forced situation. Every thing was founded on the revolution; yet the dearly purchased fruit of the revolution, the hope of liberty, was destroying daily. The violent hypocrisy of the government deceived no one; and without the pale of government itself, a varnish of carelessness and levity, the proud consolation of victory, served in a slight degree to cover that slavery, which people did not even hope to conceal. Hence there was an appearance of inconsistency on every side, which sophistry alone could veil; but the continual employment of this sophistry excited a singular irritation among the victims of the existing order of things. The apologists of arbitrary power laid hold of arms wherever they were to be found: they sought for them in the ancient glory of

French writers, in the lustre of the reign of Louis XIV; and, as there was no living literature, owing to the circumstances of the moment, the armies of the dead were called up, and ages past summoned to battle. The part that Madame de Staël would take was obvious. She had thrown herself into a kind of opposition, and a little hostility against French criticism was only the natural defence of her opinions.

But she was animated by higher motives. She knew by experience, that we double our ideas by changing our point of view. The literature of a witty and cultivated people always appears to form a complete whole, when considered from within; and it tallies so exactly with the spirit that formed it, and the spirit it has formed in its turn, that there no longer exist any judges with respect to it. But when we emerge out of this sphere, when we come to breathe another air, among the new sensations we experience we find pleasures before unknown. On returning home we regret these pleasures. Every thing appears to us under a different aspect, and we perceive, that

what we had taken for the nature of things is frequently nothing more than a national way of feeling.

This was the effect Madame de Staël wished to produce. Finding on the confines of France a country that offers the strongest points of opposition to France itself, she hence derives the secret of those contrasts, by means of which we render prominent what would be too vague and indefinite, if exhibited by itself. Two fundamental differences offered themselves to her view; and these differences, brought forward throughout her work, constitute what may be called its spirit. She opposes on the one hand the empire exercised by society, to the freedom of solitary thought; and on the other the effect of that metaphysical doctrine, which subjects the mind to the sensations, to that of the opposite system, which gives sovereign authority to the mind. The first of these contrasts could not fail to be particularly prominent in the literary part of the work, the second in the philosophical.

The authoress makes her *debut* with pure French wit. Desirous of proving, that she is

quite at home in the field of noble elegance and light gracefulness, Madame de Staël shows herself capable of satisfying all the niceties of a difficult taste, when she pays homage to a new order of beauties. It is perhaps the only occasion, on which we have seen the cause of enthusiasm defended with the weapons of ridicule and pleasantry.

The delightful chapter *On the Spirit of Conversation,* may be placed among the number of treatises on art, composed by perfect masters of the arts discussed. Madame de Staël there discloses all her secrets, without running any great risk of being robbed of them.

The first part, on the manners of Germany and the general aspect of the country, approaches the form of travels. In it Madame de Staël depicts the first sensation of melancholy, which we feel in a gloomy and severe climate, and the more agreeable disposition that succeeds it. What she says of some ravishing music, that she heard during a dark winter's morning, in the streets of a little town choked with snow, is well adapted for an emblem of the country

itself; and we experience a similar sensation, when we study the language and literature of Germany. Something penetrating and profound, something tender and forcible, seems to reach our heart, through a mist of indeterminate expressions.

Madame de Staël characterizes with exquisite discernment the spirit of society in the different states of that country, divided as it is in such various ways, as well as that of their institutions; and when she comes to speak of education, she gives her own ideas on this important subject. Nothing can be more ingenious, or more just, than the reasons she assigns for the little success obtained, when we would substitute the study of the mathematics and natural history for that of the dead languages in infancy. This part concludes very brilliantly with a description of a national festival in the mountains of Switzerland, a fragment which pedants in geography have found out of place, but which is of enchanting beauty.

The second part, treating of literature, is the most extensive, and most calculated to

excite curiosity. The choicest productions of the intellect among a laborious and enthusiastic people are there displayed to our view, and a whole order of unknown beauties strikes and interests us by turns. Before entering on their works, the authoress introduces us to the writers; for this literature, yet young, has scarcely seen two generations of men, and Madame de Staël had herself an opportunity of conversing with the illustrious aged, who were its founders. The sudden display of a very original way of thinking in an old European nation, arrived in many respects at the same degree of civilization as others, is a phenomenon extremely curious; and in painting this phenomenon with truth, and sagaciously developing its causes, Madame de Staël was quite at home.

She has drawn the characters of the authors with that warmth and benevolence, which were natural to her. Schiller especially, the virtuous author of so many dramatic pieces, the admirable poetry of which is sufficient to secure their reputation, is treated with particu-

lar predilection. He had personally acquired her regard by the most amiable qualities, particularly by that affecting frankness, which so well assorts with genius.

Her extracts from dramatic pieces are enchanting. Scenes the most brilliant, of the most striking effect, often the most heart-rending, succeed each other. We are introduced to the situation by a few words, and the dramatic art immediately lays hold of us with all its magic power. Here also Schiller is presented to the greatest advantage, and the tragedies of the poet are abridged or translated with astonishing beauty of colouring. We may remark here, as well as in the improvisations of Corinna, to what a height Madame de Staël has risen in poetic prose, a kind of writing so difficult in French, when the object is to excite strong emotions of the heart, through all the pomp of diction.

The genius before which all Germany prostrates itself, that of Goethe, is well characterized by Madame de Staël. The infinite address with which she defines that intellect, so bold

and so profound, those talents, so flexible, yet perfectly under control even in the midst of their eccentricities, was the more necessary, because the extraordinary productions of such a writer will never perhaps be duly appreciated out of Germany.

Among the remarkable passages of this part, the portrait of Attila, which Madame de Staël herself has drawn, has been quoted as a sketch of genius. Her translations from Mary Stuart, from the Louisa of Voss, and those of a number of detached pieces, display her prodigious susceptibility of emotions, and her astonishing capacity of expressing them. The language, the manners, the prejudices of the country are to her transparent mediums, through which she sees distinctly the beauty of sentiments, of situations, of literary conceptions, the most foreign to our manners; and her imagination transmits, as by a miracle, the impressions with which it is struck.

With respect to the dramatic systems of the French and Germans, Madame de Staël has not taken so decided a part as has been asserted.

She has rather weighed their inconveniences and advantages against each other, than assigned the superiority to either. She was strongly moved by the dramatic exhibitions of Germany, and this was fortunate for us. The person who gives an account of the literature of a foreign country must first relish it, otherwise it is probable that he still remains a stranger to it. In the two nations, as painted by Madame de Staël, literature altogether must take a different direction. Authors, inspired by a wish to please a particular society, naturally conform to what that society has always approved, while solitary writers yield more to their own feelings. The former set out with the design of composing a work, the latter think only of expressing their own sentiments. The former have a well digested plan to execute, the latter have the rich materials of their own thoughts to employ. Hence, in the literature of one country, beauty of style will be prevalent; in that of the other, truth of sentiment. Great masters will reconcile both; but,

when a sacrifice must be made, the predominant principle will manifest itself.

In dramatic writing, the personality of the poet is transferred elsewhere; but then German and English authors are as careful in adhering to an adopted character, as they would have been in the display of their own. They endeavour to follow the changes an individual undergoes, and trace the progress of a moral revolution, still retaining the personal identity. Now this alone is sufficient to exclude that rule, which confines the action to twenty-four hours; for sudden changes show the power of the passions, not of the man; and do not so much disclose the character, as render it unnatural.

Historical tragedy, which the interests of the day are perpetually demanding, does not easily submit to the law of the unities. This we find when we attempt its application. But in treating the question in the abstract, the French critics will always have the advantage; since the kind of probability imposed by the laws of Aristotle, seems to have nothing

in itself incompatible with nature and strength. The art has not introduced itself into the external regulation of German plays, though they contain a sublime poetry of sentiments and situations. The French is the only beautiful, the only regular form; nay, there is no other that can be called a form. While the critics then have wished to preserve it, while they have always said to authors, "do better, produce a profound impression without violating common sense, combine moral probability with physical probability;" they are perfectly in the right: but by dint of being right, they will ultimately banish poets from the stage.

When the tree that has yielded the finest fruits becomes rebellious to the hand of cultivation, must we condemn the soil to sterility? If the sap refuse to flow in abundance through its ancient channels, what will be the event? The change of manners banishing various pieces in succession, the stage will become impoverished; strong and pathetic imaginations will recur to romance, to the great detriment of their glory, that of their nation, and that of their age; to the

detriment of the finest effects, and of that electrical emotion, which is communicated at the theatre; nay more, to the detriment of poetry itself, which will languisn for want of an employment at once noble and popular. In fine, as we must have tragical impressions, authors will always be found, who, laying all art aside, will content themselves with tears and full houses, and compose melodramas."

That such was the opinion of Madame de Staël, is evident from the following words. "Some scenes in foreign plays produce more vivid impressions, but nothing can be compared to the imposing and well regulated whole of our dramatic *chefs-d'œuvre*: the only question is, whether, by confining ourselves, as at present, to the imitation of these *chefs-d'œuvre*, any new ones will ever be produced."

After the very amusing reading of the first and second parts, that of the third, on philosophy and morals, appears somewhat abstract and difficult; but the fine performance of Madame de Staël, undertaken from the noblest motives, and executed with uncommon intel-

ligence, demands not the less of our esteem. It required some courage to treat on important subjects which were, at that time, in extreme disfavour in France.

The origin of ideas in the human understanding being the metaphysical question, to which the most important interests of religion and morality are more especially attached, Madame de Staël bestows on it a particular investigation. The material philosophy had gained much ground in Europe, ever since a principle, true in itself, had become the basis of a system not less erroneous than destructive of all moral responsibility. Because the elements of our ideas have been imparted to us through the channel of the senses, it has been inferred that the mind itself is nothing but a sensitive machine: and as an active intelligence in the breast of man, and a God in the universe, are such corresponding ideas, that it is difficult to reject one without rejecting the other, an absolute materialism, or atheism, was the result of these opinions. All the German philosophers, from the time of Leibnitz, have employed themselves in combat-

ing this doctrine. But, in attempting to restore moral nature to its rights, many have been driven toward idealism; and even they who have attributed the greatest influence to external objects have rather spiritualised matter, than materialised spirit.

The perspicuity, and elegance, with which Madame de Staël gives an account of all these systems, are astonishing. We see in her no trace of pedantry. Avoiding as much as possible scientific terms, she does not say, and does not even pretend to know, any more than just what it is necessary, to appreciate the moral influence of these doctrines. She does not constitute herself directly judge of the truth; but, convinced that the whole universe is the work of a beneficent and sublime intelligence, she seeks the truth in what most elevates the mind, in what renders us the most capable of accomplishing the sublime and beautiful, such as they are conceived by genius or virtue.

The general spirit of these systems could not but please Madame de Staël. Nothing could

be more favourable to the flight of imagination than a philosophy which exalts the activity of the mind, and subjects the whole world to intellect. When she vaunts, therefore, its happy influence on the arts and on poetry, we have little to object. The fine arts being founded on the mysterious relations of our mind to the universe, all the affections, all the emotions of the soul, must be listened to by the artist. He ought to attend to his slightest impressions, to magnify them, and to give himself up to them, in order to become capable of imparting them. In the moral sciences also, sentiment is one of our guides: but it is not so in the physical sciences. In these, man is only a spectator; what he has to study is the relation things bear to each other, and he must put himself and his feelings out of the question. Accordingly, the followers of the late German doctrines have made little progress in the study of nature; and Madame de Staël has not been sufficiently severe on the erroneous notion, on what indeed may be called the disease of Ger-

many, that the mind is capable of finding all the sciences in itself.

It is true she does not altogether approve such a reverie; but, by regretting that certain conceptions of the imagination are not more attended to by the learned, she has appeared to think, that the experimental method advances knowledge only by a sort of mechanical process, and that in it every thing is confined to the observation of facts. Having unfortunately never bent her eagle eye on these subjects, she has not done justice to the vast grandeur of the faculties that are displayed in the study of the sciences, when the only course is followed that ensures their advancement. Not only are prodigious powers of intellect developed in it, a circumstance she could not altogether overlook; but the imagination, though kept in check, never remains wholly inactive. It is the imagination that secretly points out to the investigator the path he ought to pursue; it is the imagination that forms those suppositions, often bold, the value of which experi-

ment must determine: but it does not betray itself; unexpected discoveries alone reveal its existence, and then the uncertain gleams of light disappear before the splendour of truth *.

On the other hand, we cannot read without profound admiration the chapter entitled, *On Morality founded on Self-interest.* With an overwhelming strength of reasoning, with a feeling eloquence peculiar to herself, Madame de Staël crushes to atoms the doctrine that pretends to enjoin the sacrifice of self in the name of self-advantage; which confides to the enemy, egotism, the defence of the place attacked; and which, proposing the same interested calculation as the ground of every action, justifies vice as much as it dishonours virtue. We may defy the powers of subtlety to obscure such a light,

* The daughter of a man of letters, who felt himself attacked in what was most dear to him, the glory of those illustrious men, who adopted the experimental method, may be forgiven this digression. Mr. de Saussure, in fact, has furnished an example of the most powerful imagination restrained by reason; since his modest diffidence induced him to hold in doubt his happiest ideas, till he could support them by incontestable facts.

and cannot too strongly recommend the reading of this chapter, which alone is sufficient to place Madame de Staël among the first class of moralists.

But the last part of the work, *on Religion and Enthusiasm*, is that in which her lofty talent of inspiration reaches the greatest height. There another *Corinna* appears, or rather a celestial genius, who collects into one ravishing hymn all that can support and strengthen a generous heart. What she understands by enthusiasm is not, as she takes care to explain, a delirious exaltation. It is the divine harmony of a mind at once ardent and calm, in which the adoration of moral beauty, and of the primitive source of all beauty, reigns. Examining the highest enjoyments, those of the heart, those of the mind, and even the pleasures of imagination, she finds in them all that divine flame, which raises above the world the heart in which it is kindled. Fame, talents, the arts, music, poetry, love itself, all these joys, often profaned, and often also calumniated by man, appear to her in their original purity as gifts of the Crea-

tor. In her eyes, a ray of celestial goodness illumines all nature; and seeing in her own enthusiasm a happiness, that will never forsake her, *she feels, that when the grand struggle arrives,* (may her presage be accomplished!) succour has been prepared for the inspired soul, *whose last sighs are, as it were, a noble thought ascending toward heaven* *.

The fate of this work is well known. The censors of the press made a number of erasures in it; and the passages suppressed, which have since been restored, are, from their harmlessness, a satire on the government that could not endure them. However, though not a line in it might appear to deserve blame, the general spirit of the work was too inimical to the interests of despotism; all the selfish passions, which it was then of importance to cherish, were too clearly exposed and too powerfully combated; and, if it were unjust to seize such a book, it was not perhaps inconsiderate. Accordingly, those fine pages were returned to the

* Madame de Staël's own words, near the end of *Germany.*

paper-mill, and the authoress was soon more cruelly persecuted. There were men, to whom an infernal penetration suggested, that Madame de Staël could be most severely wounded, in the objects of her affection. Monsieur de Montmorency, who had so many titles to the rank of her principal friend, and Madame Recamier, a charming and amiable woman with whom she was intimate, were condemned to perpetual banishment for having gone to console her. This was one of the cruellest strokes, that ever reached her; never was sorrow more poignant than hers; and she then resolved at any price to quit a land, where she imagined she diffused the contagion of unhappiness.

Surrounded as she was by guards and spies, flight appeared as dangerous as it was difficult. She had to pass through armies, to go to seek in Russia not an asylum, but the only sea to which the road was now open to her. The idea of exposing her daughter to the hazards of such a journey; that of quitting all her friends, the tomb of her parents, and even Switzerland, which had become a

second country to her, though in some degree a melancholy one; in fine, that of fleeing as a criminal over land and sea; all these ideas wrung her heart, or inspired her with dread. Courageous from pride, she had an imagination easily alarmed, and the phantoms of fear were to her terrible realities. Her anxieties, her irresolution, her internal struggles, reduced her to a fearful state; but among the steps she might have taken there was one, that never for a moment engaged her attention; a single line in praise of the tyrant. Such a line she might assuredly have introduced and drawn up without impropriety: it would have restored to her France, her friends, the exercise of her talents, and the confiscated property of her father: but she could never admit the possibility of writing it.

It was to strengthen her mind, that in 1812, a little before her final departure, she composed a work against *Suicide*. She sometimes reproached herself with having shown in her early writings a degree of admiration of the courage which this culpable act requires. And

though her sole object was to clear the memories of a few unfortunate persons from an imputation, which of all others they least deserved, that of cowardice, an opportunity of promulgating a better doctrine offering itself, she seized it with avidity. A double voluntary murder, accompanied with romantic circumstances, had excited in Germany a senseless enthusiasm among the periodical writers and men of the world. Madame de Staël felt strongly, on this occasion, the necessity of taking an opposite side to those whom she had so much praised. She detected a mixture of vanity in this horrible scene. She saw in it a worthless melodrama carried into actual execution; and was desirous of showing, that a degree of affectation might accompany in their last moments those, who could thus make a public exhibition of their own death. Taking up the subject in a general point of view, she employs the utmost strength of her talents to unfold the resources that religion and a lofty morality afford to man in misfortune. In this work, affliction is represented as a regenerating means in the hands of providence. Not

to withdraw ourselves from the action of that suffering, which is destined to improve us; to study the laws, and more especially the spirit of Christianity, in order to convince ourselves, that this religion condemns suicide; and to place moral dignity rather in resignation than in revolt; are the counsels she gives to the unhappy. In other works, she had admired Christianity, and vaunted the aid of which it is prodigal to the afflicted: but all this might be, if I may be allowed the expression, from without. In the present work, the last she composed on this subject, she places herself in the centre of the system; and, unhappy herself, adheres to the only faith, that saves us from despair, precisely because it consecrates sorrow.

At length, in the spring of 1812, in fact at the last moment when flight was possible, Madame de Staël resolved to depart. She had in some measure exhausted her strength in uncertainty; and when, after having passed the frontiers of Switzerland, it was out of her power to retract her resolution, her courage seemed to have forsaken her: When we read an account of this sin-

gular journey in her *Ten Years of Exile*, we are astonished, that amid the dangers, which were present to her imagination, she was able to observe with such accuracy the countries which she traversed with such secrecy and speed. This moment, above all others most interesting to study, bordered on that of the deliverance of Europe: and while, on the one hand, those sentiments, that were about to produce such a terrible explosion, had reached their highest point of elevation, on the other, a pusillanimity, a submission almost servile, seemed to characterize the governments, entangled in the great net of Buonaparte's politics.

Followed closely by the French armies, Madame de Staël did not take breath even in Russia, for already those armies were at her heels. In her fright, she was on the point of taking the road to Constantinople, in order to reach Greece. She had always entertained the design of visiting that country, and of acquiring at the fountain-head that oriental colouring, which was to enliven her poem of *Richard Cœur de Lion*. But the fear of exposing her daughter to the

perils of such a journey induced her to turn her steps towards Moscow.

Nothing is more curious than the manner in which Madame de Staël estimated the Russians. Through the veil of servitude, through that of superstition and ignorance, she discerned admirable features of national character; a proud public spirit, united with a gentleness, a mobility of imagination, that formed a contrast with the most vehement passions. She beheld this people as a southern race transplanted into the regions of the north. The singular spectacle of a recent civilization, grafted on the remains of the ancient East, that of a terrible nature and a terrible climate, in some degree subdued by dint of magnificence, would have been highly interesting to her at another juncture; but the French army was already advancing. Madame de Staël quitted Moscow precipitately, and her footsteps were obliterated by its flames.

Her stay at Petersburgh was not long: for while she by no means thought herself in safety there, she also experienced very painful reflections. This city, so beautiful; its splendid edi-

fices, agreeable society, and rising institutions of the greatest promise; all were threatened with destruction. Opposite and equally painful impressions were added to these. The national effervescence was extreme: and though this disposition of the people's minds increased the enthusiasm inspired by the presence of an illustrious woman, who would not deign to bend beneath the yoke, the idea, that such an effervescence was about to be directed against the French, filled the mind of Madame de Staël with terror. Sweden, the native land of Mr. de Staël, promised her a more agreeable and safe asylum, and accordingly, after passing a fortnight at Petersburgh, she repaired to Stockholm.

The disasters of that year, so terrible to all Europe, affected her deeply; but in such a frame of mind, she found some consolation in living in Sweden, under the protection of a French hero, to whom she vowed a sincere friendship. Like him, Madame de Staël was bound to France by her affections; to the cause of Europe by a hope mingled with nume-

rous fears. In Sweden she published her work on Suicide, which she dedicated to the Prince Royal.

In the beginning of the following year, Madame de Staël went to England. There she produced the most lively sensation. Sought after at first as a prodigy, she continued to excite an equal eagerness for her society by her inexhaustible resources, and the charm of her disposition. No prejudice against women that intermeddle with politics, none of those habits that tend to restrain the influence of women in society, could hold out against the attractions of her conversation. Speedily acquainted with the state of the country, she astonished the aged defenders of its civil liberties by the justice and clearness of her views, and by the ability with which she embraced the interests of the present and the future. As in France, as indeed every where else, her inclination had led her to attach herself to a moderate and protecting opposition, without ever separating herself entirely from the ministerial party.

To attract general notice, however, had but

a feeble effect on the mind of Madame de Staël, and it was soon disturbed anew by a grief of no little magnitude. In England she learned the news of the death of her second son, a young man, whose impetuous character had always given her alarm, but whose noble and affectionate sentiments merited the tears he cost his family.

The feelings of Madame de Staël on her return to France have been described by her in her *Considerations on the French Revolution*, the only one of her works of which it remains for me to speak.

### *Considerations on the French Revolution.*

Though Madame de Staël had communicated to her friends the various parts of her manuscript from time to time, as they were written, when this monument of her abilities was presented to their eyes as a whole, they were astonished at its imposing grandeur. Perhaps it is the effect of its impression on the imagination; but a certain lustre of immortality has seemed to me to envelope it. That life, so ardent, so ani-

mated, is notwithstanding life eternal: that movement, so active, so unremitting, is no longer that of the passions. The mind that addresses us hovers in a higher region: it has attained that point of elevation, whence terrestrial objects appear still clothed in their richest colours, but whence they are viewed as a whole, and where we already breathe the air of heaven.

Whatever idea Madame de Staël had given of her capacity, there is such a loftiness of thought in this work, that we must have her whole life before our eyes, to conceive that she was capable of writing it. It is the fruit of the most instructive past, matured in an intellect occupied on the future. The political education, which Madame de Staël had acquired from the two administrations of her father and the different phases of the revolution; her experience of the evils inflicted by tyranny; her travels over all Europe; and above all her residence in England, where she learned, from the view of a beautiful constitution in actual practice, what theory cannot teach, and where all

her ideas respecting legislation were matured in discussions with the most distinguished men; these were the circumstances that enabled her to compose such a book. And when we consider the movement impressed on this mass of thoughts by the alarm which the return of Buonaparte, her alternate hopes and fears during the hundred days, and the dread of seeing France invaded anew, gave Madame de Staël, we may account for the ardour, the vivacity, which are united in this work with calmness of reflection. She was perhaps in a situation most favourable to a great writer, that when external tranquillity succeeds violent agitations, and when the faculties, exalted by the struggle, assume a new direction.

Madame de Staël was animated by two powerful motives. To write the political life of her father was in her eyes a sacred duty, the fulfilment of which she was not willing to delay: but when she saw liberty, the national independence, and consequently the monarchy, in a vacillating and precarious state in France, she proposed to herself still another object.

She who read an explanation of the present in the past, and of the future in the present; she who thought, that she beheld the dangers, as well as the means of escaping them; might naturally feel herself called upon to speak the truth. The idea of such a high calling both tranquillized and inspired her whole soul. Without an enthusiastic desire to do good, she would not have written such a book: with a transient enthusiasm only, she would have equally refrained from writing it. Stimulated by the ardent and firm desire of showing the necessity of morality in politics, she associated her father in her grand design. Regarding Mr. Necker and herself as joint advocates in the same cause, she proves by facts what she had advanced as a principle; namely, that whatever is founded on wrong motives must necessarily fall to ruin. No person was ever more inaccessible to calculations of success, or less influenced by mere prudential motives, than Madame de Staël. Although she was always ready to listen to the observations of her friends, she uniformly answered to such of their remarks,

as were dictated by circumspection: "*I think it is the truth, and I will speak it.*" It seems as if she had a presentiment, that in a short time nothing would affect her. The just appreciation of human things, the loftiness, the mildness even, that characterize the last moments of life, appeared in her to be combined with all the vigour of youth.

If the form of the work had not been imposed on Madame de Staël by her different objects, there are parts in it which would be open to criticism. Three analogous subjects, the biography of a minister of state, the history of a period agitated by political troubles, and the exposition of a theory of government, were incessantly running into each other, from the nature of the undertaking: and hence it follows, that the mind does not clearly embrace the whole and its parts. But if there be no unity in the plan of the work, there is an admirable unity of inspiration. It is Madame de Staël herself, with her penetration, her vivid and generous sentiments, who is the central idea of her book; and this idea we seize completely. The title

she has chosen, however, is so vague and modest, that she is sure to perform more than she has promised. We cannot demand a history, or a complete theory, from a writer who announces nothing but *Considerations*. I shall not make a regular abstract of a book, therefore, which it is difficult to analyse, and I shall content myself with considering in Madame de Staël the biographer, the historian, and the publicist.

The biography should be considered with a view to its object. Thus, whether an account of the political life of Mr. Necker would or would not add to the merit of the work written by his daughter, was not the question with her. Should she injure her father's memory, as has been asserted, by bringing his name on the carpet anew? She had reason to believe she should not. Madame de Staël desired nothing better than to excite an investigation of such conduct as his: and even if her book should revive some frivolous remarks, was it not calculated to outlive them? Besides, she could condemn her father to obscurity, if she wished

it; for history will know what Mr. Necker really was. But it will be said, Will posterity believe his daughter? Yes, it must believe her, whether it will or no, if I may venture to say so. It is difficult to resist the ascendancy of such a conviction; and what will it avail the reader, to have entered his protest beforehand against the testimony of Madame de Staël, if he finally be persuaded by it?

She has taken measures of every kind to be heard. Abandoning the hope of persuading on such a subject by enthusiasm, she intrenches herself in facts. She looks at Mr. Necker in the age in which he lived, and perceives, that his nice morality raised in his mind too many scruples, to allow him to master circumstances so powerful: but believing that the results at least will be properly appreciated, she recapitulates her father's incontestible claims to public gratitude, and seems to say, in a tone painfully subdued, This at least will not be disputed me.

Let us hope, that her feelings were judicious

guides, and that she will at least have enfeebled inconceivable prejudices. She could not avoid exalting the merit of Mr. Necker, as a statesman, by showing the palpable justice of his predictions; as a writer, by impelling the indifferent to read his eloquent pages; and, since the relationship of their talents cannot fail to be discerned, in spite of their dissimilarity, why confine to Madame de Staël those praises, which she would have found it so just and so pleasing to share with her father?

Wishing to avoid political discussions, I shall not spend much time in considering Madame de Staël as a publicist. Her admiration of the British constitution was the fruit of study and reflection. She beheld it as the best of theories carried into practice; as the combined masterpiece of time and wisdom. The principles on which this constitution is founded, these principles already consecrated in France by the charter, must secure the happiness of every nation, according to Madame de Staël, by whom they are thoroughly understood, and sincerely adopted. Such an opinion proves of itself the

sincerity of her intentions; for when we attach ourselves to a system sanctioned by experience, and that leads to no other, we can have no ulterior designs.

The application of such a system to a continental state, to a people very different from the English, both in character and manners, is exposed to difficulties, which Madame de Staël has taken pains to solve. To have combated her arguments, no doubt, would have been very fair; but she ought at least not to have been accused of giving way to imaginary ideas, when she has done nothing more than admit the consequences of the form of government to which she gave the preference. How, for instance, could any one see the effect of female weakness in the importance which she attaches to names consecrated by history? Sincerely attached to limited monarchy, she conceived, that the principles of hereditary succession could not support itself solitarily on the throne; and that it was necessary to give it a sort of external continuity in a constitutional peerage. Now, as an hereditary chamber cannot be composed of

great men to perpetuity, it ought at least to be composed of illustrious names, of names that ancient or modern glory should recommend to future ages. If the elective deputies exhibit the actual intelligence of a nation, the peers ought to be the emblem of its successive destinies.

It seems that the compact offered in this work ought not to be refused; a compact so honourable and so loyally proposed. Never could liberty, humanity, and justice, find a more zealous defender. Already each party is supported by the arguments of Madame de Staël, and is armed, as has been said, with her talents: not that she has passed from one to the other; she has remained in the track of reason, and in the equitable and moderate half of her opinion, every body agrees with her.

Accordingly, the voice that makes itself heard in this work has been listened to with the most serious attention, both in and out of France. For a moment it has brought the violent to their senses; and on the impartial many it has advanced the instructive effect of time many years.

It was the first time, that an apology for liberal ideas made any impression on those whose interest lay in opposing them.

The historical portion is that in which the authoress exhibits herself perhaps with the greatest, and certainly the most unexpected, eclat. The moral point of view chosen by Madame de Staël becomes singularly striking and varied in her pictures. Always taking the human heart for the subject, she points out its secret springs through all the events of life. She paints by turns the violent crisis of the passions, the agony of remorse, and even the wretched agitations of vanity. Always eloquent, often graceful and natural, she is occasionally terrible, and overwhelming in her indignation. No previous historian had so clearly separated the defence of liberty from that of the atrocities committed in its name. These she exposes without extenuation, without excuse; shuddering at the idea of guilt, she finds power to overcome it, only in the desire of rendering the recurrence of guilt impossible, by showing its inutility. The energy

and intensity of moral sentiment can alone explain the effect of this book; and what renders this effect so powerful is, that we find in it no palliation.

While Madame de Staël has anathematized bad motives, she has not spared errors or mistakes. Every vice, and every narrowness of the heart and mind, are laid open by her. In speaking so many truths, how is it she has not given still more offence? It is because she distributes blame with impartiality; it is because every one is in some degree consoled for the ill she says of himself, by the pleasure of hearing the faults of his enemies so well displayed; and, above all, it is because her motives are evident. Has she sought to wound, to humiliate? Assuredly not: the pain she gives is not her object, it is an inevitable consequence. It was necessary for her to exhibit the fault, to show that it had found its punishment; and divine justice can be made manifest only by human frailty.

Accordingly, she displays indignation, but never hatred; wrath, but never resentment. In

her, animosity has nothing to do with the individuals, if we may so express ourselves; she blames them, to establish maxims of conduct. The memoirs she had sketched under the title of *Ten Years of Exile*, at the moment when the triumph of tyranny was most revolting to her, furnished her only with materials, or a few scattered fragments, and she has remoulded them all with the moderation of a mind restored to its tranquillity. It is because she found a system in Buonaparte, as she says, that she has dissected his character and his politics so rigorously. In her eyes, he was the genius of ardent selfishness; the being who had erected the standard of self-interest, and of profound disdain for God and man. Never could a more striking, a more terrible example be chosen, to show the danger of principles, against which she had always contended. It is particularly as embodying a general idea, that she attacks him; and the man, whose real history has the air of an oriental fable, could not escape the moral she deduces from it.

One observation here presents itself to us.

No writer has established so well as Madame de Staël the theory, that morality ought not to be founded on personal utility, or even on the particular interests of a nation: at the same time she, of all authors, has most irrefragably proved by facts, that men and nations advance to prosperity or ruin, according as they observe or neglect the sacred laws of justice. High and luminous is the reason in both cases; for the advantage of the individual, and that of the state, are very commonly the result of irreproachable conduct: but, if this advantage be proposed as the end, every one will fancy he can find a thousand ways shorter than that of equity, to attain his end.

But who can overlook in Madame de Staël the love of country in its greatest ardour? A love of country, suffering, irritated, wounded, and sometimes feeling occasion to have recourse to expressions of bitterness. This makes her blood circulate with rapidity, inspires her always, disturbs her sometimes, and even dictates the praises she bestows on a foreign nation. England is in her eyes a future France,

See to what you will come, she seems to say; and it was necessary to extol the object, in order to quicken the progress to it. Unquestionably, she admires the nobleness of the English character; but it is as the tardy fruit of the finest institutions; and the human creature, the intelligent work of God, appears to her equal, if not superior in, France. What energy! what susceptibility to every thing connected with the national honour! What indignation at the idea, that Frenchmen are not framed for liberty! What shuddering at the sight of the foreigners in Paris! What lofty indignation at the thought of a partition of France! We should consider the general course, the tendency of the work, and not stop at a few particulars, which Madame de Staël herself perhaps would have suppressed or modified*.

* She saw her works in a new light, when they were in the press, and the correction of the proofs was with her a second composition. The editors made it such a point of duty to preserve her thoughts, that in the indispensable labour which they had undertaken, perhaps they left what was a little at variance with their own opinion less changed, than what was conform-

The sentiments of the authoress always reveal themselves involuntarily. We never find her display her motives on her own account; and above all they are never employed as means of her own justification. Madame de Staël has not even conceived the idea, that any person could calumniate her; and this is the reason why her step is so firm, and even bold. She has dared to celebrate the formidable awakening of liberty: she has the courage to confess, that there were moments when a civil war was desirable. Thus, too, she is not afraid of pointing out whatever there was of great among men, justly branded with the stamp of public reprobation. She confesses ingenuously all the infatuations, all the illusions of her youth. She seems to have transmitted her soul to her readers, and to be judged by her peers.

It is to be observed also that Madame de Staël has never spoken less about religion than in this work. She frequently shows herself

able to it, for they were most afraid of touching the letter, when nothing within themselves answered to the spirit.

greatly irritated at intolerance; she gives her opinion against the idea of a form of worship paid by government, and against the influence of the clergy in affairs of state; but a religious feeling pierces through the style every moment. Christian morality is, as it were, infused into it; and it is the first time that it has been seen applied to the politics of the age.

The talent of painting is very remarkable in Madame de Staël. However desirous she is of arriving at a moral result, the moment her recollections occur to her, she sets about delineating the thing itself, even without any other idea, than that of giving a lively representation of it. This of itself weakens our prejudices: by replunging us irresistibly into the past, this work dissipates the natural illusion, which carries back our present feelings to the times that are gone, and makes us love and hate in those times, without regard to our former impressions. It obliges us to pass in review our own errors, and thus prepares us for indulgence toward others. Accordingly, in spite of all its severity, this book incites us to

pardon; it disposes the heart to hope and to forget; and if it have accelerated the reign of some passions, it is frequently because it has softened their adversaries.

A book, in which we find so much that we have known, is read with rapidity. The heart palpitates at the renewal of so many powerful scenes; expectation recommences, and it seems as if all the tickets were put anew into the urn of fate. We read at a breath what appears to have been written at a stroke. The expression, so lively and so original, never pauses, or runs through the most happy remarks; and the evidence strikes so forcibly, that we forget the difficulty of exhibiting it. There is perhaps less wit, taken abstractedly, in this work than in the others; yet no one impresses us with a conviction of being eminently superior in this respect.

Unquestionably, this novel combination of philosophic genius, viewing from aloft events to deduce their causes, with dramatic talent, that excites a powerful interest by its striking representation of men and things, presents a beautiful

manner of writing history. A sort of inspiration prodigiously lofty results from this mixture: it seems, that this painting of realities, like the fanciful pictures of Homer, shows us the passions, those irritated deities, preparing terrible scenes, the accomplishment of which we speedily contemplate. But above all, this book reminds us of the astonishing conversational talents of Madame de Staël. There we find those spirited portraits, in which she struck directly at the prominent part of a character; those pointed anecdotes, those recitals of certain occurrences in her own life, where she placed herself in contrast with beings of all others resembling her the least. There too are those bursts of sensibility, those words that forced themselves a passage through her emotion, and moved herself, while they softened others. The life of Madame de Staël is in many respects consigned to this work, and never will she be so well exhibited as in it. Besides, we find in it a certain stamp, quickly and firmly applied; which also distinguished her. She terminates all her decisions with a

full stop; she says the last word on every person, and on every thing. In consequence, we rather hear than read her; and what best evinces the merit of the work is, that it is impossible, as it were, to criticize it as a literary performance.

When the object, too, is so noble, the sentiments so ardent and lofty, all commendation of the means of execution becomes puerile. Madame de Staël has inspired what she felt; this is the true merit of her book. She has made known a protecting not hostile liberty; a liberty, the friend of greatness of every kind, not of levelling; a liberty, the ritual of which consists of love, and not of envy and hatred; a liberty, in fine, that would no longer be distinguished from justice, if time had consecrated its rights, and more accurately defined them.

## *General Examination of the Talents of Madame de Staël.*

After having traced Madame de Staël through all her writings, I shall endeavour to

delineate her in the combination of her talent. What seems to me to characterize both this talent and her personal character, is the intimate amalgamation, and the equal proportions of wit, feeling, and imagination. And, while in most writers, and in most men, it is easy to determine which of these qualities predominates, it is impossible to say which prevails in her, and very difficult to consider them separately.

Hence it is, that she has sacrificed nothing of what is honourable to humanity. Before she appeared, religion and knowledge had their separate defenders. These two grand causes have been pleaded, as we may say, in opposition: each finding itself a stranger to a whole system of ideas, there has been in this respect a secret division among mankind, one party only appearing to tolerate the reign of reason, the other that of faith, out of pure civility.

Madame de Staël alone has embraced with equal zeal the party of knowledge and that of religion: she alone has adopted from the bottom of her heart whatever was best in dif-

ferent ages; combating on one side ancient prejudices and ignorance, and on the other modern selfishness and incredulity.

The writer, with whom we should be the most tempted to compare her, is Rousseau, because in him the same faculties were combined: but he differs from her, in not having directed them to one common object. He has often abjured the noblest part of himself; and, employing all the subtlety of his understanding to belie his sentiments, he was a sceptic in philosophy, and hateful in private life, with the warmth of heart derived from faith and love. He was a more consummate master of his art; his compositions are more finished, more profoundly meditated, perhaps; yet less sincerity, more of declamation, more of sophistry, place him beneath her as a thinker; while his intractable pride, his harsh and savage temper, communicate to his performances a gloomy ardour, that resembles in no respect the generous flame of Madame de Staël. The human kind that Rousseau fancied he loved, was nothing but an abstract idea unknown even to himself.

Madame de Staël loved what was about her, and extended to human nature her affection for her friends. What her style wants of minute finish is more than compensated by the charm of the first impulse, by the freshness of the inspiration, if I may venture to use the term. It is the stream gushing with vivacity from the fountain, that sparkles as it flows.

But something else may be remarked in her talents than this combination of different faculties: there is a marked originality in each, yet all bearing a similar stamp, which is peculiar to Madame de Staël. This peculiar stamp originates from her character, from the strength as well as the versatile nature of her impressions, from those sudden bursts of indignation, of compassion, of haughtiness, and also from her never ceasing to be a woman.

This last is perhaps her secret charm. She addresses herself as a woman to the reader, and presents herself personally to him, to tell him what passes in her mind, and also in his own. But she is aware, that he would soon forget her being a woman, if she ceased to appear amiable

or attractive to him: accordingly, whether she endeavours to instruct or dazzle, she never overpowers him with her superiority; she never arrogates to herself any pre-eminence. It seems as if chance had afforded her a good place at the theatre of moral affairs, and she recited what was thus offered to her view.

Sometimes too she presents herself as a child guiding a wise man, whose sight is a little indistinct. She explains to him all he perceives confusedly, and places him in a bright sunshine, that he may see a little more clearly himself. When she comes to lead him through steep and difficult paths, she says to him: "Do not be afraid; you will be glad you have passed; we shall soon get safe out of it." Constantly endeavouring to render the road agreeable to him, she brings herself forward to divert him, by rallying herself a little for the strong impressions she receives. Persons, words, faces, accents, attitudes, dresses, every thing, in fact, strikes her, every thing is characteristic in her pictures. She knows herself as well as she knows others; and that blind instinct, which

so frequently determines us to like or dislike, is in her a feeling founded on motives, of which she gives a clear account.

The precision of her views is such, that we forget their extreme delicacy. She has no vain subtilty, does not compel her readers to discern what is imperceptible, but every thing enlarges under her hands. Her whole attention is bent for an instant to each point, and it becomes so distinct to her, that none of its bearings escape her notice: but she takes care to connect threads too slender of themselves with others more strong, the importance of which is acknowledged. Thus we easily pass with her from the particulars to the whole, and we find ourselves at once at the root of ideas, when we fancied we were only tracing their remotest ramifications.

One of the causes of the pleasure she gives arises from that which she takes in looking at every thing, in contemplating the numerous and brilliant aspects, that objects display to her. She, who was so much alive to the discoveries of others, appears also to enjoy her

own. She produces new impressions on herself by the play of her own mind; and then her thoughts, like rockets, throw out sparkles on every side as they proceed.

Nevertheless, people have complained of weariness in reading her works; excepting, however, her first and her last. It is impossible to dispute on the feelings of others; and if this were sufficiently general to deserve to be noticed, there are two causes to which it might be attributed: one, the multitude of her ideas; the other, certain defects of style which were particularly perceptible in the second period of her career.

The copiousness of her thoughts is extraordinary. Perhaps no writer has equalled her in this respect. Take at a venture any three of her pages, and three of the author most abounding in wit, we may venture a wager that the number of striking and original ideas will be greatest in Madame de Staël. Not that she affects conciseness; every thought is amply furnished with the necessary words: but we are not accustomed to see so many thoughts

together, and perhaps there are too many—Perhaps certain phrases, which are superfluous to the train of reasoning, have on the mind the effect of those bits of cloth in the harpsichord, which stop the vibration of one string before another is struck. The succession of thoughts is too rapid and continual in Madame de Staël, to allow ordinary minds to keep pace with it. She is the goddess of plenty; she scatters from full hands corn, pearls, roses, ribands, and diadems. We would let nothing escape us, because every thing is of value; but we may be fatigued in collecting it.

That rounding of periods, which is now getting out of fashion, had the advantage of affording scope for the expansion of sentiments, by obliging the words to complete a musical circuit. But as the thoughts of Mr. Necker lost part of their strength by his excessive attachment to harmony, his daughter adopted a different practice, and was in fact more brilliant; but perhaps she would sometimes have found advantage in a form that would have obliged her to slacken her pace.

The earlier works of Madame de Staël have been charged also with a little obscurity. This fault arose from her having employed in her youth a somewhat peculiar mode of expressing herself, which was afterwards in part abandoned by her, and in part learned, and finally admired, by the public. It was owing also to her not having at first discovered the style that was best adapted to her talents... To her fertile imagination a crowd of adventitious ideas was always presenting itself, which it would have been a great pity to have rejected: but when she attempted to add them to the leading idea, a degree of confusion was the consequence: she thus obliged the reader to embrace at once ideas too remote. She afterwards adopted the plan of breaking off decidedly the thread of her discourse; and when she gave the sallies of her imagination for what they really were, the whole appeared both more clear and more original.

Thus for a long time the works of Madame de Staël wanted something on the score of art, that is to say, with respect to the perfect cor-

respondence which a composition should bear to the faculties of those for whom it is written. Neither did she write as an author by profession: she did not look at her works as something external to herself, and distinct from her own sentiments or opinions. In speaking of her literary projects, she never said, "I will write a work upon such a subject;" but, "I will show, I will prove, I will make the world understand." Buffon repolishing his description of the *swan* to the end of his life, Rousseau copying with his own hand, for Madame de Luxembourg, his *Nouvelle Héloïse*, already in print, were painters who took pleasure in the work of their hands: they stood still before the figure they had created, in order to admire it. Madame de Staël attended only to the mind. To her, words were merely instruments; and though her mode of expressing herself is almost always very happy, its merit depends more on what it represents than on what it is.

In the works of Madame de Staël the connexion of the thought is always explained, but it is by the sentiment that inspires them: all

tend to the same object, but ranged in the natural order in which they arise, rather than disposed with care. Accordingly, we may find elsewhere contrasts more skilfully managed, effects more sagaciously combined. In her, we discern every where the traces of a mind brilliant in conversation, to which unexpected flashes supervene. Frequently a highly luminous conception, more important than the immediate subject of the discourse, in itself light, both in matter and in style, breaks in upon it: still more frequently an abstract discussion is enlivened by some unexpected stroke, and the philosopher gives way to the amiable female.

A sort of carelessness about the value that might be attached to her discoveries is often remarked in her. This was the fruit of that immense creative power which gave her a certainty of being incessantly new: but it more particularly arose from her being so entirely absorbed by her subject, that she completely lost sight of her literary reputation. Madame de Staël was desirous of advancing the human

mind; she wished to revive among her contemporaries—among the French, in particular—the same mental powers which were in her so active. She would have sacrificed her life, if necessary, for the causes she has advocated; and, except the sacred writers, she is perhaps the only one of superior eminence whose principal object was something nobler than fame.

The more her laudable motives have been understood, the greater has been the merit allowed her works. She had always written from impulse; but an inspiration, the origin of which is personal, does not impress upon talents their noblest character. It was not only in manner that Madame de Staël improved: the increasing excellence of her works, both in matter and style, seems connected with a similar progress in her own existence. There was more harmony within, and more also between her and others. Her ardour, turned wholly to a fine sentiment of morality, vivified a more extensive sphere, and was at the same time more equal and more communicative; her emotions, better

regulated, expanded more abroad. The effervescence of youth did not increase her real strength: the ardour of her mind required not the warmth of the blood.

If any one of Madame de Staël's productions be not altogether herself, her mind is diffused through them all. It will be difficult to recompose in thought that prodigious being; but posterity will find scattered about what we have possessed in its most astonishing, as well as in its most amiable combination. They who are desirous of writing, in particular, will read her works over and over again; not, assuredly, to aim at imitating an originality, which in them could no longer deserve the title, but because they will find in them the two elements of creation, matter and motion. To that mine they may have recourse without end, and without being suspected, because every thing it contains has not been worked up. On a second, on a third reading, we shall find, with surprise, ideas that we had not before noticed, ideas that we imagined we had derived from our own experience. These books, in which

every thing seems to be said, still invite to reflection, and they point out to the mind more paths than the author had time to explore.

On the whole, the works of Madame de Staël appear to belong to a new age; they announce, as they tend to produce, another period in society and in literature; the age of strong, generous, animated thoughts; sentiments proceeding from the bottom of the heart. She has furnished the idea of a literature in some sort, rather spoken than written; of a kind in which the extempore speaking of national assemblies, unrestrained confidence, and conversational sallies, inform us more strongly and more intimately of politics, of the passions, and of society, than studied rhetoric has ever done.

Thus the literary art has been exalted by her. It will no longer be an idle industry, a means of exciting the image of an empty beauty in our hearts; it will be more closely connected with life, and will exert more influence over it; it will exhibit less the labour

of man than man himself connected with immortality. It will be the general expression of the noblest wishes, the depository of thoughts, which some day will realize themselves in useful enterprises or institutions, and the future will exist in it entire.

# PART THE SECOND.

## SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC LIFE OF MADAME DE STAËL.

It is time to consider Madame de Staël herself, and to paint her directly from my remembrances: a painful and difficult task; a task to be entered upon without thinking too long on the subject, giving myself up to those feelings that hurry me along, and repressing those that would check my progress at every step.

I shall therefore exhibit this illustrious woman under the circumstances best known to me, or which appear to me most characteristic. Without confining myself in any respect to the order of time, I will exhibit her at first such as I saw her during the life of her father, reserving to myself to point out sub-

sequently the changes which were produced in her by time, and almost all of which were to her advantage.

## *Domestic Relations.*

If we would form a just idea of Madame de Staël, we must contemplate her in her affections. There are people enough inclined to imagine, that; in a woman of such celebrity, self-love must stand in the first rank. [redacted] this been the case, she would have [redacted] a happier fate; as her success [redacted] sufficient to satisfy the wish[redacted] only necessary to have s[redacted] in the midst of sufferi[redacted] gardless of her fame. [redacted] to sacrifice the fruit[redacted] of her regard, t[redacted] centre of h[redacted] truly liv[redacted]

It [redacted] that[redacted]

Staël had a considerable influence on all her feelings: but this too is unjust. It is unquestionably difficult to ascertain with accuracy the part of a faculty, which disposes of our hopes and fears, even in the sincerest attachments, and enlarges by turns the merits and the faults of those who are dear to us. However, there was nothing chimerical in the affections of Madame de Staël. She did not fancy that she loved: her tenderness was real and profound, though her poor heart was often a prey [redacted] phantoms of her imagination.

[redacted] dame de Staël did love, nothing [redacted] sentiment affected the purity [redacted] She was not ambitious of [redacted] ing, neither was there to [redacted] ceptibility, alive to the [redacted] ich it inspires, which [redacted] call it, the vanity [redacted] first object is [redacted] ious of the [redacted] at pleases [redacted] an the [redacted] was

not thus with Madame de Staël; she loved the qualities of her friends more than their enthusiasm for herself; and, as she loved sincerely, she felt it very natural to be beloved. In the same manner, the loftiness of her sentiments inspired her with a generous confidence in the esteem of those who knew her; and she could endure many reproaches from them without being offended. She judged of sentiments on a large scale, and from the conduct: to her, actions appeared, after all, the best guide for appreciating the motives of the heart. Thus, on the one hand, she did not readily admit excuses for any deficiency of attention; and, on the other, when the conduct was good, she did not criticise the motives. If any one acted towards her from interested motives, she perceived it instantly, but without suspecting it beforehand.

The distinctions between different kinds of attachment were never less marked than in her. The sentiment was one and the same in her, and assumed the decided cast of her character, much more than that of the different relations of life, or the disposition of the per-

sons she loved. In her, maternal and filial affection, friendship, gratitude, all seemed love. There was passion, or at least emotion, in all her attachments. They appeared to differ rather in intensity than in kind; and they were naturally expansive, ardent, impetuous, and even stormy: not that these storms were the effect of any caprice in Madame de Staël, but she revolted against the obstacles which the frame of society, and often human indolence, oppose to the enjoyments of the heart. For a long time she comprehended only her own manner of loving: for a long time she refused to believe the existence of sincere sentiments, that did not express themselves like hers; and the clear knowledge she had of herself led her into error, when she judged of others from herself. But her most ardent reproaches were also the most affecting: her love was conspicuous through her anger. She never gave pain to another, but because she felt more herself, and you could not avoid pitying her even when she wounded you most severely.

To judge of her attachments, in all their

energy, as in all their excellence, it is necessary to have known that which she felt for her father: a wonderful sentiment, that embraced the whole of her existence; and which acquired still more strength from the idea of death, than from that of the most sacred bond of life. Besides, as this tenderness made part of herself, as it was mixed up with all her thoughts, and affected them all, we cannot lay it aside in speaking of Madame de Staël.

There was such an understanding between Mr. Necker and his daughter, they felt such pleasure in conversing together, and their minds so well agreed, that Madame de Staël was led to exaggerate to herself the idea of her resemblance to her father: and the more numerous the points were, in which she thought she traced this resemblance, the more enthusiastically did she admire those qualities in which he was really superior to her. She saw in him a being similar to herself, whom the excess of virtue would have captivated. He supported retirement, dispensing equally with pleasure and with admiration. Conscience and a senti-

ment of dignity were the sole springs of a life simplified by wisdom. He even resisted the power of the strongest affection he had upon earth, when he refused to live with his daughter at Paris: this refusal might give her pain, but she bowed to his decision. She ascribed to him her own thirst of action, all the fire of her character, in order to enhance the value of the sacrifices he imposed upon himself; ascribing to him the tastes of youth, to give greater merit to his privations; and thinking of his great age, only to enhance the wit and agreeableness he still retained, as being on that account the more wonderful.

Two sentiments, extremely vivid in Madame de Staël, gratitude and pity, had also their object in Mr. Necker: gratitude, the best founded, for a solicitude uncommon, even in a father, for its constancy and judicious direction; and pity, profound and piercing, for his sufferings; pity for that great mind, that excellent character, misunderstood and calumniated; pity for his age, and the ills with which it was threatened; pity, not on his own account alone, for the fatal

moment that was approaching: so that the liveliest pleasures his daughter enjoyed in his company were sometimes closely followed by tears.

However, she was little disposed to anticipate future troubles; and, if a sudden flash disclosed to her what was to come, the present moment soon re-occupied her thoughts. Heaven had made her improvident; and Mr. Necker has said, that she was like the savages, who would sell their hut in the morning, without thinking what they should do at night. With regard to him, she would pass instantly from the most anxious solicitude to the completest security. So full of life herself, she could scarcely believe in death. Unable to endure the thought of looking on her father as an old man, whatever she found in him of pleasing and agreeable, his quick comprehension of her meaning, a certain freshness of imagination, of curiosity, of gaiety, which he still possessed, were incessantly cherishing illusions in her. She conversed with him as mentally her equal, and forgot the difference of their ages. Some person once telling her, that Mr. Necker had

grown old, she repelled the idea with a sort of anger, answering, that she should consider the person who repeated such an expression as her greatest enemy, whom she would never see again as long as she lived.

Thus she fed herself with hopes, and retained the capability of amusing and diverting her father. Thoroughly acquainted with his disposition; knowing that, as he had renounced bodily exertion, he had so much the more need of mental activity; she was incessantly supplying him with matter to feed the sacred flame of sentiment and thought, and perhaps she long guarded him, not only from the fear of ills, but from the ills themselves, by rendering day after day more interesting to him.

With respect to herself, mental activity, new objects to excite it, and finally amusement, were necessary to her talents, her gaiety, her happiness, and even her health. What she drew from the varied scenes of the world is inconceivable; and this spectacle, of so little profit to others, called into play all her intellect, and

gave new life to her moral powers. In a retirement too long protracted, on the contrary, her great faculties consumed themselves. With her, domestic happiness was soon disturbed by that imagination which did not find full employment for itself without; and, notwithstanding the extreme sweetness of her temper, she could not impart the same pleasure to her family. Often blaming herself, she endeavoured to surmount her natural disposition by force, and habituate herself to retired life; but then it seemed as if another person had taken her place, and Madame de Staël subdued was no longer Madame de Staël.

In this respect no person was more thoroughly acquainted with her than Mr. Necker. He comprehended the whole of this kind of feeling, and the want of new objects appeared to his paternal eyes a necessary appendage of the sort of distinction by which he was charmed. Nothing certainly could be more natural than that Madame de Staël's frequent visits to Paris should meet the entire approbation of her father. Powerful motives called her to France, and

there she kept up the only connexions which he himself still retained, with a country always so dear to him. But when her exile commenced, Mr. Necker equally approved her diversifying the monotony of a residence at Coppet by journeys of pleasure, or of information. He submitted to her absence without effort, without any affectation of generosity, and because he felt, that the disposition he loved having been formed, it was necessary to leave it to its career.

Besides, with such a continual, animated, and delightful correspondence, as that between Mr. Necker and his daughter, the complete idea of separation did not exist. She never wrote to any person as she did to him. The letters she addressed to her friends were charming; but, unless she had some particular object in view, they had always, after the death of her father, something a little too vague, perhaps too melancholy. Some happy stroke, some delicious tint of sentiment, was always reminding us of the writer; but, after having seen her distinctly, we fell again into a profound obscurity with

regard to what concerned herself. We reproached her with being deficient in narrative; and no doubt she was desirous of avoiding what recalled to her mind too forcibly the sort of correspondence she maintained with her father. "My dear friend," she once wrote to me from Italy, "I stop, in spite of myself, in the midst of these narratives; it was thus last year I wrote to him, I amused him with my observations, with my thoughts: alas! can every thing go on as when he was alive!"

In fact, what a multitude of striking anecdotes, what masterly descriptions, were contained in her letters to Mr. Necker! Nothing could be more agreeable than this mixture of narratives, sallies, rapid yet grand views, gentle raillery, portraits of illustrious personages, so minutely exact, that they might readily be turned into caricatures; the whole softened down, as it were, with the general tinge of that tenderness which she felt at the mere idea of her father. These letters have unfortunately been for the most part burnt, and never perhaps will their equals be seen.

But what was still more striking, still more extraordinary, was the fire, the first burst of her narratives, when, returning from a long journey, she saw her father again at Coppet. Her profound emotion, which she checked a little, that she might not communicate it to him, spread like a torrent over her conversation. Things, men, governments, the effect she herself produced, all was related with an effusion of joy, caresses, tears, and tender pleasantries. Every thing had a reference to her father; and she gave him as it were a part in the piece she acted before him, so strikingly was what she had met with contrasted with his peculiar turn of wit, his goodness, his perfect morality. The most striking and singular representations concealed indirect praise of her father, or an expression of tenderness for him. How animated the noble countenance of Mr. Necker became with paternal pride, while he listened to her! How did she shine in his ever youthful eyes! not assuredly because he took to himself such high commendations, but because he read the heart of his daughter, and enjoyed her prodigious talents.

In the course of an agitated life, she may have occasioned her father some uneasiness; but what pleasure did she not give him! what attractions did she not display in that sacred intimacy! what freedom from restraint! what devotedness! what love! She felt every thing for him, involuntary inclination, the blindest filial confidence, solicitude in some sort maternal, even personality, rigid selfishness, in associating herself with his interests and his fame. She did not think she could materially exist without her father. Doubtful and irresolute in little things, she had need of him every moment: she consulted him on every particular; on her expenditure, on her dress, on her domestic arrangements, on the treatment of her children. And, persuaded as she was, that every thing is within the compass of a certain mind, she was desirous of his reading the romances that were published, that he might compare them with hers. In one of her letters she jokes on such a commission given to a statesman.

One of Madame de Staël's greatest pleasures

was her father's laughing at her. There were some anecdotes in which she acted a part droll enough, that she was never tired of hearing him repeat. She contrived to lead the conversation to them; and while Mr. Necker was relating them, her eyes swam in tears. Thus there was a story of the old Marechale de Mouchy, one of the greatest ladies of the old court, whom Mademoiselle Necker, then seventeen, asked what she thought of love; and another of the sly and languishing look of some Polish princess, which Mademoiselle Necker, while yet a child, had imitated, and of which she would have acquired the habit, had it not been observed by her father. There were many other stories which Mr. Necker told with infinite spirit.

I know not whether I dare mention certain scenes, too private, perhaps too familiar. I shall venture on the following, however, so characteristic does it appear to me of Madame de Staël's great susceptibility of emotion in every thing concerning her father, and of the manner in which she endeavoured to act on

the imagination, even when addressing herself to persons of the lower class.

Mr. Necker being at Coppet with her, had sent his carriage to Geneva to fetch me and my children. It was night when we set out; and on the road we were overturned into a ditch. We were none of us hurt, but it was some time before we could get the coach up again, and it was late when we arrived. We found Madame de Staël alone in the parlour. She was rather uneasy about us: but when I began to relate our accident, she stopped me short, asking: "How did you come?" "In your father's carriage." "Yes, I know that: but who drove you?" "Who? his coachman, of course." "What! his coachman Richel?" "Yes, Richel." "Oh, good God!" exclaimed she, "he might have overturned my father." Immediately she sprung to the bell, and ordered Richel to come in. Richel was putting up his horses, and it was necessary to wait.

During this interval, Madame de Staël paced

the room backward and forward in the most violent agitation. "What! my father, my poor father," said she, "he would have been overturned! At your age, and that of your children, it is nothing; but with his size, his great size!—In a ditch; and he might have lain there a long time; and he would have called for help; have called, perhaps, in vain." Then, overcome by her emotion, she was obliged to stop, till anger had given her fresh strength.

At length Richel came. I had an extreme curiosity to know what she would say to him; because, highly indulgent as she usually was to inferiors, she could not fail to give vent to such ardent feelings in a manner altogether original. She walked up to him with solemnity; and with a voice, at first almost choked, but which gradually amplifying, at last ending in violent bursts, said: "Richel, have you ever been told that I have wit?" The man stared. "Do you know, I ask you, that I have wit?" The man was still dumb. "Let me tell you, then, that I have wit, a great deal of wit, prodigious wit;

and all I have shall be employed, to make you pass the rest of your days in a dungeon, if ever you overturn my father."

I have often since endeavoured to divert her by relating this scene, in which she threatened the coachman with her wit. But she, who was so easily diverted at her own expense, was never able even to think of this adventure, without being agitated afresh with anger and emotion. All I could bring her to say at most was: "And with what could I threaten him, if not with my poor wit?"

If imaginary dangers produced such an effect on her, it may be supposed what her anxiety was when better founded. I wish I could give an idea of the letters she wrote from Germany, at the moment she was preparing to return, in consequence of having formed apprehensions for her father. There is one in particular, that surpasses imagination, by its alarming, terrible, yet deeply affecting energy; it is a letter of twelve pages, which she wrote to me three days after receiving the fatal news. There is nothing in it that requires secrecy; and by publishing

it I should do honour to the memory of Madame de Staël: but I could not bring myself to promulgate this effusion of a bleeding heart, where nature is completely unveiled in the unrestrained indulgence of despair. Another reason prevents me from transcribing here any letter of Madame de Staël. I have often heard her speak with just indignation of the custom lately introduced of publishing, without respect to the dead, and without regard to the living, the private correspondence of celebrated persons. Not daring, therefore, to consider the goodness of my intention as a sufficient excuse, I shall religiously abstain from offending against a sentiment in which I fully participate.

Madame de Staël was already on her way to Coppet, when she heard of her misfortune. My husband and I went to meet her, taking with us her second son; and, finding her at Zurich, we returned together.

I had had the painful satisfaction of attending Mr. Necker in his last moments; I had contemplated that death of the righteous, of the Christian, of the tenderest of fathers; I had

beheld his lips already pale, his hands trembling, implore the blessing of heaven for his daughter, for France, for himself; and never were prayers more pure addressed to heaven. From that moment the ties between Madame de Staël and myself were drawn still closer; from a cousin I became a sister, and a character more sacred and more intimate was stamped on our friendship.

I will not describe the trying scenes that succeeded between us. It is not when grief displays itself in all its violence, that genius is distinguishable. Convulsions, the horrible agonies of a distracted heart, are the same throughout the whole race of poor mortals, and there is no room for distinction in great paroxysms of mental suffering. It is in the intervals a little calm, that I find again Madame de Staël, and in these I shall paint her.

A few of these moments of truce occurred during our melancholy journey, and never perhaps was I more struck with what was wonderful in her. When the depression of sorrow succeeded to the violent bursts of grief, Madame

de Staël requested us to converse in the carriage, probably because the noise of speaking assisted her in obtaining the command over herself. Mr. Schlegel accompanied her; and as, whenever so little mistress of herself, she was incessantly thinking of others, her desire of exhibiting him to advantage led her to start briefly the subjects on which she wished him to talk. Mr. Schlegel in consequence displayed to us a great variety of new ideas; and when the conversation became animated, it sometimes happened that the talents of Madame de Staël were revived, and she entered at once into it. Then, talking of Germany, its men, systems, and society, she displayed an extraordinary fire and beauty of expression; a thousand brilliant pictures succeeded each other; till, as if seized by a deadly fang, she fell again under the sway of grief. She reminded one of those fireworks exhibited on a stormy day, in which a sudden explosion throws out sheaves of sparks, that squalls of wind and rain as suddenly extinguish.

It must not be supposed, however, that her

attention was completely called off from her sorrow; an almost imperceptible tremor, a slight contraction of the lips, evinced, that her sufferings had not ceased; and that her words rose, as it were, above her grief.

Amid the desolate state of matters on our arrival, the singularities of her imagination were soon evident. A sort of delirium seized her. Believing she had lost the guardian of every thing necessary to her, the ties of things in general seemed to her dissolved. She imagined that her fortune would be dissipated, that her children would not be properly educated, that her servants would pay her no obedience, that nothing would proceed, nothing would be done, without her father. Childish uneasinesses were one of the forms of her grief: and when, seeing her vexed by trifling things, hitherto so foreign to her thoughts, I said to her: "What does that concern you?" she would answer, "It is because I have no longer a father."

During Mr. Necker's lifetime, Madame de Staël had actually remained as ignorant as a child on most of the affairs of life. Not only

had she been unwilling to embrace the idea, that she could some day do without him, but she had not even conceived it; so that, in fact, he had the whole care of her existence. To his daughter, therefore, the world seemed to have fallen with him, and she had need of a very powerful and very difficult exertion of the will, to make herself acquainted with the state of her affairs at the time of this misfortune. Nevertheless, believing it incumbent on her, and supported by the sentiment of filial respect, she succeeded. Unwilling that the fortune which had been made by Mr. Necker should be dilapidated in her hands, she from that time managed it with great skill; and was always generous, and at the same time scrupulous, in the employment of the wealth inherited from her father, and intended for her children.

It would be necessary to relate how every day passed with Madame de Staël, if we would give an idea of the place that her deceased father constantly retained in her heart. She never ceased to live with him. She always felt herself protected, consoled, succoured by him.

She invoked him in her prayers; and never did any occurrence, that was fortunate for her, take place, without her saying, "My father obtained that for me." His miniature she always carried about her, and it was to her the object of a kind of superstition. She never parted with it, except on one occasion. Very ill herself, and finding great consolation in contemplating this portrait, she imagined that when her daughter lay in, it would produce the same effect on her. Accordingly, she sent it to her, desiring her to look on it, when she was in pain. Every old man, too, recalled her father to her mind, and made a particular impression on her. To every thing in which old men were concerned she was peculiarly sensible; and once, when, in the time of her persecutions, an old man acted towards her with a degree of pusillanimity, then common, and undoubtedly more excusable at such an age, she was extraordinarily grieved at it. "I am very silly," said she to me, "but what would you have? he was kind, he was old, he sat at my table, I altered my hours for him, and all these things grieve me to the heart."

Her bounty to the aged, who stood in need of her assistance, was immense: the idea of their sufferings tore her heart, and, as true Christians see Jesus Christ in all who are poor, she saw her father in every man that was old.

There was nothing Madame de Staël could not forgive, except an offence to Mr. Necker. The extreme facility with which she forgot any injury done to herself might even have made her thought light-minded, had she not remained eternally grateful for the slightest service. But, when her father was in question, she was not to be appeased; and she was equally incapable of forgetting any ill spoken of Mr. Necker, and remembering any said of herself. She did not revenge it, but she preserved an eternal coolness. After having read a book entitled, *L'Anti-Romantique*, she said, "The author rallies me pretty smartly, but it is with taste, and he possesses the true French gaiety: what a pity that he must have a hit at my father, too! had it not been for that I should have invited him to dine with me frequently, when at Paris."

We may be assured, that, if the occasion

had been presented, she would have defended the memory of her mother with equal warmth. Her long forbearance towards Madame de Genlis, who never ceased to attack her with severe criticisms, while she was the victim of persecution, is well known. "She has attacked me," she said; "I have praised her: and thus we are at variance." But when, during the reign of Buonaparte, the same lady spoke of Madame Necker in unfavourable terms, Madame de Staël was irritated to a greater degree than I ever saw her on any other occasion. "Does she suppose," she exclaimed, "because I neglect myself, that I will not defend my mother? Let Madame de Genlis abuse my works, or myself, as long as she pleases; they are in existence, and may be read; and so am I, to make myself loved or feared. But my deceased mother! my mother, who has no longer any person living to take her part but myself! . . . . She has preferred my father to me, and no doubt is in the right: so much the more do I feel that I have his blood in my veins; and while that blood continues to flow,

I will not suffer my mother to be insulted." It was long before she could be persuaded, that it was at least useless to repel this attack: because, writing in a foreign country, as her exile compelled her, the work would get into the hands of none but the ministry, and tend to multiply the attacks made on those she loved, without her being able to make public in France what she might say in their defence.

It is to be regretted, however, on many accounts, that she did not execute her design, and that we do not possess a portrait of her mother, such as she would have drawn it at that juncture.

There is great beauty in the thought of that bas-relief, which, after the death of Mr. Necker, Madame de Staël had sculptured on the funeral monument of her parents. An airy figure, as if already beatified, is drawing towards the skies another, that appears to look with compassion on a young woman veiled, and prostrate on a tomb. Madame Necker, her husband, and her daughter, are represented under this emblem,

which likewise indicates the passage from this life to life eternal.

Filial duty, that intermediate sentiment between piety and love, was a prominent feature in the character of Madame de Staël: it occupied her life, and it softened the pains of death. And to us, who now lament her loss, the idea that so entirely occupied her mind, that of a re-union with her father, sheds a consoling balm on our wound. They are now together; they are with Him who formed their hearts; and posterity itself will no longer separate their names. These names reciprocally exalt each other: each guarantees to the other a peculiar kind of excellence; and there is no grandeur, no moral beauty, that does not appertain to their re-union.

The motto of Madame de Staël might have been the following verse, which she often repeated with emotion:

"O liberté de Rome! ô mânes de mon père!"
"O Roman freedom! manes of my father!"

When I was speaking of the early youth of

Madame de Staël, I stopped at the moment of her marriage, because my only object was to make known the education she received from her parents and from circumstances. At present, when I tax my memory, I would endeavour to recollect some particulars of Baron de Staël, but I scarcely knew him. My intimacy with Madame de Staël commenced only in the year 1792, when she came to take refuge with her father in Switzerland, after having escaped, as by a miracle, from the bloody second of September. Baron de Staël, then absent from France, could not accompany her, and I had few opportunities of seeing him afterwards.

Notwithstanding the great number of persons who sought the hand of Mademoiselle Necker, the choice of a husband, agreeable to her parents and to herself, was not easy. She would not quit France; and her mother, a zealous protestant, insisted on her marrying a person of the same religion. Under these circumstances, Baron de Staël fixed the attention of Mr. and Madame Necker. To great loyalty,

extreme good temper, and sincere admiration of Mademoiselle Necker, he added nobleness of manners and distinguished birth. The king of Sweden, Gustavus III., with whom he was a great favourite, openly favoured his suit, and promised to assure him the place of ambassador in France for several years, in order to remove Mademoiselle Necker's apprehensions of quitting Paris. Besides, Baron de Staël engaged never to take her to Sweden without her own consent. Such were the reasons that induced her to marry a foreigner much older than herself, and whose tastes were not very similar to hers. The course of this union, a little cold, no doubt, would have continued uninterrupted, however, had not the improvident generosity of Baron de Staël degenerated into prodigality. His affairs becoming in consequence rather deranged, Madame de Staël felt herself obliged to use her endeavours to prevent the fortune of her children from being affected by them: but the separation, to which this gave rise, was not of long continuance. When, debilitated by the progress of age and disease, he required

the attentions of his family, Madame de Staël returned to him. She was on her way back to Switzerland with him, to settle near Mr. Necker, when death carried off her husband in the midst of the journey, and deprived her and her children of the satisfaction they would have felt in diffusing happiness over his declining years.

Madame de Staël was a very tender mother: and if maternal love shone less conspicuously in her than filial, it is because she was more strict in checking the expression of it. Already in Delphine, where she shows herself so captivated with the poetical beauty of exalted sentiments, she had said, that passionate effusions are not valued by children, and that kindness and equity suit them much better. Subsequently she imposed on herself the same reserve from other motives. Speaking of her eldest son, she wrote to me as follows: "I know not why I say less to Augustus than I feel. There is a certain maternal modesty, which I have always felt. There is a necessity for separation in this relationship. Have I not survived all that was most valuable on earth? Why, then, should we

indulge so much an affection, that death must dissolve?"

Notwithstanding this greater restraint of expression, maternal feelings, as she gave a thousand proofs, partook in her of the nature of all others. It was not, perhaps, a blind love, independent of the merit of its object: the faults of her children presented themselves strongly to the eyes of Madame de Staël, but she was not deficient in that natural affection which may be deemed instinct. This displayed itself even in her anger, when they were guilty of any imprudence; in a sort of courageous ardour, and self-devotedness, when they stood in need of protection; and, above all, in her fears, when their health was endangered. Her daughter, when six years old, having fallen ill at Frankfort, she was almost out of her senses with grief. "What would become of a mother," wrote she, "trembling for the life of her child, without prayer? This situation would make us find out religion, if we had never even heard of it before." The happiness and amusements of her children, and the opinions enter-

tained of them, were always to her subjects of lively interest, and her scruples as to the result of any of her determinations respecting them were very apt to torment her. The fear, therefore, of the evil influence which her exile might have on their future fate was one of the greatest causes of chagrin to her during that period.

She had no opinion of the success of extraordinary systems of private education. It is necessary, according to her, to inspire youth with lofty and religious sentiments; but to initiate it into whatever is most pure in the real world, rather than make for it a world apart, always incomplete and artificial. "I have set before my children," said she, "life as it is; and I have used no artifice with them." Truth was the first basis on which she built; and not only all deception, but all affectation, seemed to her useless and dangerous. She equally disdained to assume with her children that tone of studied childishness, by which people think to put themselves on a level with their understandings: she raised them to the

level of her own mind, and herself to the level of their innocence.

When children were not intimidated beforehand, by the idea given them of Madame de Staël, they were naturally pleased with her, and some were singularly fond of her. There was an ingenuousness, and consequently youthfulness, in her manner of speaking; and genius, with its unexpected impressions, has always something infantile about it. She watched young children with tenderness and curiosity. I have seen her divert herself very much with the whimsical impressions and grotesque associations of that age; people collected them, to relate to her, and they supplied food for her thoughts.

She was inclined to blame that too ostensible devotedness of parents to their children, which is a fault of the present mode of education. Little creatures, who see every thing calculated for them, become vain and selfish; and, far from acquiring the principle of studying the good of others, from the examples by which they are surrounded, they imagine themselves

co-operating in the general purpose, by taking care of their own interests themselves. They exercise a capricious authority over those, whose sole object of attention they suppose themselves to be, and a contest of cunning on both sides is established. Madame de Staël expressed her will with decision. Having always entertained a high idea of paternal power, she gave the law in her family; and did not think the heart was debased by the religious inculcation of obedience.

A just and moderate exercise of authority saves a thousand tricks, a thousand falsehoods in education. Reasoning fails; entreaty lowers those who have recourse to it; affection, employed as a means, wears and finally hardens the heart. The ties between parents that command with mildness, and obedient children, are the only real, the only serious, the only peaceable ones; and infancy, weak and destitute as it feels itself at bottom, is not long attached to any thing but protecting firmness.

The motives of Madame de Staël's orders, however, were much too refined for her to refuse herself the pleasure of announcing them.

She explained them distinctly, but without entering into discussion, and the *preamble* of the law did not render it less absolute.

She gave many lessons to her children herself; but, conformable to her principle of the necessity of sincerity, she rejected those little games, by means of which people pretend to teach the elements of all kinds of knowledge. When a study is not sufficiently interesting of itself, which must sometimes happen, the simple idea of duty ought to supply the deficiency. This idea is readily conceived in infancy; and far from its being proper to reserve it for a subsequent stage of life, it never acquires any strength, unless it have slowly shot out deep roots in the mind. Children are not long the dupes of these compulsory diversions; and a thousand sallies, injurious to the end proposed, proclaim the right they have to play in their own way. Besides, as the principal advantage of study, at an early age, consists in the exertion it obliges the mind to make; and that of amusement, in the scope it gives to the activity of the child; when we mix diversions

with the lesson, and constraint with the pleasure, we lose the fruits of both.

But it was when beginning to enter on the period of youth, that the openness of Madame de Staël with her children was most remarkable. It is true, she was not so indiscreet as to say any thing to them, that should endanger the interests of others, or her own; but she exhibited herself to them in her natural colours, and in all sincerity: she displayed to them her character as it was, neither sparing herself, nor ascribing to herself a sentiment or a quality that she did not possess. Thus she always blamed herself in what occurred between her and her mother: thus she has said to her daughter in particular, that the vivacity of her affections and opinions had hurried her into dangers, from which nothing short of a mind like her own could have extricated her; and that her too great warmth, in politics for instance, had drawn upon her animosities, the effects of which, painful to her heart, might even have proved formidable, but for the lustre of her talents, and, perhaps, that of the ser-

vices she had rendered. She had suffered too much herself, to wish her daughter to follow her steps. Accordingly, she did not advise her to seek after celebrity; and even in conversation, while she admitted her to be extremely witty, she cautioned her against imitation; whether because she judged, and with reason, that another must be inferior to her in her own way; or that her own manner did not please her in another. She did not love copies. "Echoes tire me:" she said. "I have enough of myself in myself, and I want to hear something else than the sound of my own voice."

For her sons her ambition would have been greater; yet, previously to unfolding their talents, she wished to form not only their morals, but their capacity for business; conceiving, that when we make real affairs our path to success, we may at least remain on the road without inconvenience. Accordingly, at an early period she placed her eldest son at Paris, in the centre of activity and of pursuits, guiding his steps by her admirable letters. "Observe the impressions made on you," said

she to him, "and learn what life is: you can pursue no study more advantageous than this."

By a confidence and sincerity very uncommon, by a singular vigilance amid so many various occupations, by a continual watchfulness over the morality, happiness, and whole existence of her children, Madame de Staël rendered herself adored by them, while she placed on all sides counterpoises to the enthusiasm with which she inspired them. Thus, along with that imagination, and that sensibility, which they admired in her, they found the strictest sense of morality, a pure and even fastidious taste in conversation, and the persuasion, rational at bottom, though approaching to superstition from its intensity, that there is no misfortune which does not originate from a fault. They found, above all, that religion of the heart, which, combined in her with the idea of her father, added to the affections of consanguinity in their family. She wrote to her son, on the anniversary of the death of Mr. Necker: "I write to you, my dear boy, on a very melancholy day, rendered still more

solemn by my departure. I have thought of you at the foot of that monument, which you will see again before me, and at which you will offer up your prayers. It is on the holy thoughts, of which it is the image, that I fix my mind in moments so painful. Believe me, my dear friend, we have nothing else to set against life."

I cannot better give an idea of the impression Madame de Staël produced on her children, than by quoting some passages from a letter which the Duchess de Broglie wrote to me on this subject:

"My mother attached great importance to our happiness in infancy, and sensibly participated in the vexations incident to our age. She sometimes conversed with me as with an equal, when I was twelve years old; and nothing can give an idea of the joy I felt, when I had spent half an hour familiarly with her. I felt new life, I was raised to a higher rank; and this gave me courage for any sort of study.

"Her children always loved her passionately. From the age of five or six we disputed who

loved her most; and when she had a separate conversation with one of us, it was a reward of which we were extremely jealous. When with her, we were happy at heart, and in self-satisfaction.

"On Sundays she read my grandfather's sermons to us. She would never have a governess for me, and gave me lessons every day during her greatest afflictions. The unfolding of our minds was enjoyed by her with such delight, that no reward was equal, in our estimation, to the sight of the happiness we gave her.

"She placed herself on a footing of equality with her children as soon as possible, and told them not only that her heart had need of them, but even that they might be a sort of support to her. Amid the vexations of her exile, she often consulted them. I have heard her say to Augustus: 'Your approbation is necessary to me.' She spoke to me of my future life, and of all her plans for me, with perfect frankness.

"On certain occasions she would remark, that one of her children had been superior to her in courage or decision; she would testify

respect for his character: yet we never ceased to respect her, and our respect was always mingled with a kind of fear. Though she displayed the greatest confidence, the moment the task of education was resumed her authority was unimpaired.

"She carried her scruples with respect to us very far, reproaching herself even for our faults, and saying to us: 'If you commit faults, I shall not only be very unhappy, but I shall be stung with remorse.' When she blamed us, adding: 'It is my fault; I could not support banishment; I did not afford you an example of courage and resignation,' we were cut to the heart. Nothing can ever give an idea of the impression produced by that mixture of dignity and confidence, of emotion and reserve, which there was in her behaviour to her children. Those words, that she pronounced with tears restrained from flowing, are engraven on their hearts; and the idea of the pain they gave her by acting ill, the idea of the blame she would have taken to herself, was one of the strongest checks they had against it.

"No person ever had more native dignity; and it was this that allowed her to admit her children to the most intimate familiarity; and even occasionally to inspire them with pity for her sorrows, without their having ceased to revere her. Never was a mother more open, and at the same time more authoritative."

It is a curious subject, to those who reflect on education, to examine the succession of characters in families. We may frequently observe great differences in appearance, united with a strong resemblance at bottom. A desire of originality, the aspect of some inconveniences in certain modes of life, produce external contrasts, while sentiments are transmitted imperceptibly from one generation to another. Thus Madame de Staël was of an ardent and impassioned temper, as Madame Necker really was, notwithstanding the command over herself she exerted: and Madame de Broglie (who will allow me to speak of her, since it is to make a remark advantageous to her mother) has caught that loftiness, that candour, that purity of mind, which were ever per-

spicuous in Madame de Staël, through all the singularities of her imagination.

## *Connexions of Choice.*

I shall venture to place in the number of voluntary ties those which I had the happiness to form with Madame de Staël, since our family connexion was rather their occasion than their cause. Now it is in the course of such connexions that the natural disposition is more freely displayed. Our duties are less strict, equality is always supposed, and, as the duration of the intimacy is guaranteed only by that of the sentiment which produced it, certain apprehensions of coolness or rupture are entertained, that bring every resource more into action. Here then we shall contemplate in real life those contrasts between opposite qualities, that render the talents of Madame de Staël so remarkable, and we shall find in the individual the originality of the writer.

Madame de Staël could not avoid forming

many friendships. She inspired this sentiment almost at first sight, and she was touched with the effect she produced. Besides, to her every thing seemed a motive for attachment. She loved persons for their virtues, their talents, their accomplishments, the happiness they afforded her, or the misfortunes they had experienced. Admiration, if it extended ever so little to the qualities of the heart, was in her a tender affection; gratitude was another; and the slightest attraction, even good-nature, had something vivid and animated, that gave birth to the sentiment in others, and which she caught by rebound. And as she never changed, as she never forgot any person; as, after ten years of separation, she would "renew the interrupted conversation," as she expressed herself; it followed, that she formed friendships in an infinite number of degrees, and sincere friendships in all those degrees.

Let me not be misunderstood however; it was difficult to attain the highest places in her affections. They who occupied the first places, too, had the firmest hold, and they were seldom

usurped by others. The oscillations, inevitable with such an imagination as hers, took place with each of her friends round a fixed point, to which her heart always returned. "There are ninety degrees fixed," said she, "in all my affections, and only ten moveable."

When we speak of Madame de Staël, we seem desirous of giving words a more active and penetrating signification. Thus pity was a painful feeling, that pierced her through, and from which she could relieve herself only by solacing the unfortunate. Her goodness had something in it of inspiration, if I may use the term. The idea of a pleasure to be procured haunted her, like that of a grief to be assuaged, and she could find no rest till the benevolent action was performed. The word love, too, is feeble to express what she felt; yet we cannot employ another, for misfortune alone gave her most powerful affections the grand characters of passion.

In fact, and it is here the contrast is particularly striking, she detected with extreme sa-

gacity the weak side of those very friends, who were so necessary and so dear to her, and perceived their defects with a painful vividness. As I have observed with regard to the authors who pleased her most, her most exalted enthusiasm was circumscribed, and did not embrace the whole. Her dissecting knife spared none of the objects of her attachment, and perhaps left only her father untouched: but the qualities, which the most rigorous examination left them, made so strong an impression on her heart, and so forcibly struck her imagination, that they seemed to her unique, inestimable for her happiness; and a limited degree of admiration produced in her an affection without bounds.

This continual appreciation of her friends, not only of every one, but of each daily, this appreciation made incessantly in their presence, sometimes hurt them, and led them to doubt her affection. "With you we must submit to be judged at fresh cost every morning," said I to her. "What signifies it," answered she, "if I love the more every evening?"—She added,

"Were I going to the scaffold, I could not help passing judgment on the friends that accompanied me."

However, this examination was extended to herself. She was curious, if I may so say, about her own feelings; and every one was at liberty to turn her eyes on her own heart by their observations, or even their censures. She studied herself on all occasions; and if she have rather too frequently made the persons in her romances say, "Such is my character, such is my nature," it is because these expressions were familiar to herself. She endeavoured to attain a thorough knowledge of her own inclinations, and the peculiar turn of her imagination, in order to set them aside as much as possible in the judgments she formed. Thus she blamed herself sometimes for her too powerful antipathies, though she was inclined to think that her tact was right at bottom, and that the future would justify her presentiments.

She has often said, that, after having accused herself of precipitancy in her estimation of merit, a more profound acquaintance with the

person had almost always brought her back to the notion she had first formed. "A single day, or ten years," she would say, "are necessary to know mankind. The intermediate time is deceptive."

An idea of Madame de Staël cannot be formed, without ascribing to her the most perfect clear-sightedness. She saw clearly, and always clearly; clearly into the general opinions of society, into the feelings and motives of every individual, into the hearts of her friends and relations. Her illusions, when she had any, related only to the future; not that she did not frequently divine the future also, when it occupied her thoughts; but because she was little inclined to think on the subject. And, as in the heat of the most animated conversation, the spirit of observation did not forsake her; as she perceived at the extremity of the room a disapproving smile, a symptom of wounded self-love, a countenance prepared for objection; so, in regard to her actions, whether they sprung from her affections or from her opinions, she was perfectly

aware whether they endangered her happiness or not. She proceeded towards her purpose, whether voluntarily chosen, or imposed by misfortune, without being blind to the least of the obstacles or dangers that she must encounter on the road. Her life was a drama of the higher order of poetry; a tragedy, in which all the parts were strongly conceived, and amply unfolded. Wisdom, prudence, were there displayed at full length: it was impossible to add any thing to the beauty, the strength of their reasoning: but a predominating sentiment oftener acted the part of the Destiny of the ancients, and turned the balance.

Madame de Staël was extremely constant in her attachments; she could never break with any person; she could never cease to love. An affection once conceived became a disease of her heart, the wrongs offered to which made its cure a matter of difficulty. These wrongs she felt very deeply, but she sought only to be relieved from their remembrance. Perhaps she knew at bottom, that no real security remained; and that the same occasions would bring a re-

petition of the same faults: but she was not the less inclined to pardon, for she loved. She was indulgent by nature, as well as from a consciousness of her own superiority. She beheld every thing from a higher station; and, after the first moment, often indeed a very painful one, she was not astonished at any imperfection. To her knowledge of human nature, and her profound compassion for it, was added the power, which the features, the movements, the sound of the voice, of those she loved, exercised over her. It was *they*, was their excuse: they pleased her still, and appeared justified in her eyes. A certain tenderness for their weakness, for that alloy imposed on all kinds of excellence, all kinds of greatness, in this world, mastered her heart; and she lessened the weight of the faults of her friends, by extending them to human nature at large, and even to herself.

In *Delphine*, a book in which she has said every thing, may be seen a proof of what I here advance. At the moment when Delphine learns, that she has been deprived of every hope of being married to Leonce, by the

treachery of Madame de Vernon, the utmost violence of her grief is let loose against her friendship betrayed. She gives vent to her rage in the severest reproaches. But Madame de Vernon, seeing herself unmasked, does not take the trouble to justify herself: she disdains any farther endeavour to please, and, answering drily, exhibits herself under a new and singularly unpleasing aspect. This change strikes Delphine with a sort of terror. Perceiving, for the first time, that she has completely lost her friend, the idea, that she shall never see her again such as she was formerly, entirely occupies her thoughts, and from that moment their parts are exchanged. It is Delphine who becomes the suppliant, and who, amidst all her agitation, wishes at least to excite a movement of pity in the breast of her whom she had so much loved. Such precisely was Madame de Staël: she wished to efface from the heart of a friend even the remembrance of the wrong that friend had done her, lest remorse should take from him his frankness, and he should be less happy, and less agreeable.

As to indifferent persons, their offences she pardoned without thinking of them, and without its requiring the least exertion of magnanimity. In her eyes they were mere machines, who blindly followed the law of their own interests. Their ingratitude had no hold on her happiness; for she thought it the height of folly to suffer that to be disturbed by those who could in no manner contribute to it. "How is it possible to be angry," she would say, "with those we do not love?"

Thus as long as her esteem for her friends was not radically altered, Madame de Staël endured all their faults: what she was incapable of enduring was the fear of never seeing them again, the idea of an eternal separation. This was the phantom that persecuted her; this was the monster, whose varying form was incessantly giving her fresh alarms: and when, during her exile at Coppet, those around her began also to become objects of proscription, and a desert appeared to be forming on every side, the terrors of this kind she suffered were dreadful. All the powers of her mind con-

spired together to torment her; and her talents, dead to all useful occupations, exercised their strength upon herself in the cruellest manner. Nevertheless, in her most painful moments her conversation was occasionally brilliant. It was so to a degree that at first astonished me: but, however, on regarding her with attention, the state of her mind was evident. "It is a sonata I am executing:" said she afterwards. "I am like an expert musician, who plays difficult passages without thinking of them. I speak without participating in the conversation; and have not ceased to suffer for a moment."

But of all separations, that arising from a rupture was most distressing to Madame de Staël. Self-love had so little share in her affections, that she had rather see her old friends cool and changed with respect to her, than not see them at all. The impossibility she felt of breaking any ties, gave her, as she said, a sort of inferiority to those she loved. The match, according to her, was not equal: her friend could menace her with a rupture, a threat she

never employed herself, and thus endeavour to usurp a cruel empire over her. Her real friends were literally necessary to her. They were more so than they felt themselves inclined to believe. Seeing her always surrounded, always shining in wit, always occupied with a thousand different objects, they believed, or pretended to believe, that they might withdraw unperceived: but it was not so; all these things in which she seemed to take such a lively interest, would have vanished from her with the happiness of friendship. "Never," would she say, often indeed mistakenly, yet with a perfect and painful persuasion of its truth, "never have I been loved as I love."

Her conversation tête-à-tête was such as it is impossible to give an idea of. No one could acquire a knowledge of her except in intimacy. Her finest pages, her most eloquent speeches in society, are far from equalling, in overwhelming energy, what she said when, not feeling herself obliged to adapt her conversation to her audience, she performed on an instrument that was unique, and which she herself had tuned.

Then her great mind, expanding its wings, indulged itself freely in its flight; she looked not before her, and, rather a witness than the mistress of her own inspiration, she exercised a natural influence, which she appeared also to experience; an influence, whether good or bad, for which she was not responsible. Sometimes, animated with a bitter and cutting vein, she blasted with deadly gales all the flowers of life; and, carrying fire and sword to the heart's core, she destroyed the illusion of sentiment, the charm of the dearest connexions. Now, giving herself up to a gaiety singularly original, she had the ingenuous gracefulness and confidence of infantine simplicity, the dupe of every thing: and now, rising higher, she abandoned herself to the sublime melancholy of religious genius, that penetrates the nothingness of terrestrial existence.

But it was with such of her friends as were unhappy, that she displayed her greatest powers. Hurried away by profound and rapid feeling, it seemed as if she explored heaven and earth,

to find solace for their troubles. Nothing could be so ingenious, nothing so good, as what she invented to amuse them, to dissipate for a moment the gloomy clouds of sorrow. She appeared to dispose of the future, and create one expressly for them, in which, by dint of friendship, she restored every thing to its place. The evils of imagination, taking them in the largest sense, were alleviated by means as singular as themselves. With what eagerness did she listen! An ardent curiosity respecting the feelings of persons who were sincere was so evidently mingled with her tender compassion, that you were never afraid of tiring her, when you confided to her your griefs. It was no longer she and you; your minds were amalgamated; and she raised you to such a height, you soared over such an immensity, that the happiness, the unhappiness, the past, the present, the fate of all men, as well as your own, vanished away. A solemn feeling had taken the place of every other, and you would think you were present together at the most sublime spectacle, that of

the Deity accomplishing His work of regeneration on the creature, by the terrible yet salutary means of affliction.

Alas! how terrible it is to have to suffer without her! How dispose of feelings, in all of which she participated! We almost feel remorse at our grief for having lost her; because our regret is not sufficiently disinterested. We feel banished from a delightful region, where we experienced enjoyments that we can never taste again. She was herself with her ravishing gifts; and then she was also the medium, through which we received every thing that is curious, instructive, or worthy of attention upon earth. We feel as it were a contraction, an impoverishment of existence; we lose ourselves with her, and there is personality in lamenting her.

To give an idea of the manner in which she felt the grief of others, I will mention a circumstance relating to myself, because, as is natural, nothing ever struck me so forcibly. It will be seen what she was, even after having lost the vivacity of youth.

In the year 1816, my mind yet distressed by the most terrible of misfortunes, the loss of an angelic daughter, I was at Nice with my other daughter, who was also very ill. A violent crisis in her disorder took place, and during these decisive hours, my feelings were so acute that, unwilling to alarm my family by my letters, there was no person in the world but Madame de Staël to whom I durst open my heart. She did not answer me on the subject; and our usual correspondence having continued, I thought my letter had miscarried. I was not sorry for this, as I was afraid that the answer would only renew my emotion even after the favourable termination of the case. A few months after I was completely confirmed in my idea. We had already seen each other several times, without her mentioning my letter, when one day at Coppet, after we had been chatting a long while, she ceased all at once to answer me. I looked at her, and, observing her pale and agitated, said with alarm, "What is the matter?" "It is," answered she, "that I have never been able to

write to you, to tell you . . . ." She hesitated so that it was impossible for me to comprehend her meaning.—" Your letter," at length she cried: "let us say no more about it, let us never speak of it again . . . ." and she went out of the room, her eyes bathed in tears.

As I am not writing the Life of Madame de Staël, I ought to refrain from multiplying narratives, that would give this sketch the appearance of an imperfect biography. Nevertheless, I should reproach myself were I to pass over in silence an event of such importance as her second marriage, and the circumstance of her life, that could not fail to excite most astonishment, obliges me to enter into some particulars.

A young man, of good family, inspired a great deal of interest at Geneva by what was said of his eminent courage, and by the contrast between his age and his tottering walk, his paleness, and the state of weakness to which he was reduced. Some wounds received in Spain, and the effects of which ultimately proved mortal, had brought him to the gates of death, and he

remained ill and suffering. A compassionate word or two, addressed to the unfortunate man by Madame de Staël, had a prodigious effect on him. There was something celestial in her tone of voice. Madame de Tessé said: "If I were a queen, I would have Madame de Staël to talk to me always." This ravishing music renewed the existence of the young man: his head and heart were fired: he set no bounds to his wishes, and immediately formed the greatest projects. "I will love her so," said he at a very early period to one of his friends, "that she will at length marry me." A singular expression, that might be inspired by various motives; but to which the most uninterrupted devotedness and enthusiasm oblige us to give a favourable interpretation.

These lofty pretensions were seconded by circumstances. Madame de Staël was extremely unhappy, and weary of being so. Her highly elastic mind had a tendency to resilience, and required but one hope. Thus, at the moment when the bonds of her captivity were drawing more and more close, and gloomy clouds were

gathering over her head from all quarters, a new day came to break upon her; happiness revived as from its ashes in her desolate heart; and the dream of all her life, matrimonial love, seemed capable of being realized for her. What such an union was, in her eyes, is well known. That pleasantry of hers, which has been quoted, "I will oblige my daughter to marry for love," expressed a serious opinion. The thought of forming such a tie herself had never been altogether a stranger to her mind. In speaking of the asylum, which she hoped some day to find in England, she has sometimes said; "I feel a want of tenderness, of happiness, and of support; and, if I find there a noble character, I will make a sacrifice of my liberty." This noble character was found, on a sudden, close by her. No doubt she might have made a more suitable choice; but the inconvenience of love matches is, that they do not originate from choice.

It is certain, however, that this union rendered her happy. She had formed a just opinion of the noble mind of Mr. Rocca. She

found in him extreme tenderness, constant admiration, chivalrous sentiments; and, what always pleased Madame de Staël, language naturally poetic, imagination, even talents, as some writings of his show, graceful pleasantry, a sort of irregular and unexpected wit, which stimulated hers, and gave her life the zest of variety. To these were added profound pity for the sufferings he endured, and apprehensions continually reviving, that kept alive her emotions, and enchained her thoughts.

She would have done better, no doubt, had she avowed this marriage; but a degree of timidity, from which the sort of courage she possessed did not emancipate her, and her attachment to the name she had rendered illustrious, having restrained her, her ideas were wholly employed in parrying the difficulties of her situation. Must we say, that it would have been better for her not to have placed herself in that situation? Must we say, that Madame de Staël is not to be set up as an example in every point? To this she herself would willingly have assented: this she has said to her children; this

she has insinuated in her writings, as much as a proud mind, conscious of its own greatness, would permit. She was a phenomenon, single in its kind, upon earth. With her we forget the conditions of our nature; we forget, that society, being arranged for the mean of human faculties, prodigious gifts are discordant to the organization of life. It would have been something still more extraordinary than Madame de Staël, if nothing had been extraordinary in her but genius, if an interior existence of such activity, the actual source of her talents, had manifested itself by her talents alone.

The happy improvidence of her character was of great service to her in the course of this union. After severe alarms for the health of Mr. Rocca, she quietly resumed the belief, that his life was not in danger, and that his sufferings were merely casual. Nothing remained of her uneasiness but a constant attention, remarkable in a person of such vivacity, to the cares necessary for his preservation. All her great intellect was employed to serve him. But who can express what she suffered in critical mo-

ments? At Pisa, where he was near dying, she compared herself to Marshal Ney, who was then expecting his sentence every hour. Endued with talents, that preserved her from no sorrow, and augmented all she felt, she has since said, that she would write a book, the title of which should be, "One sole unhappiness in life, the loss of a beloved object."

This unhappiness was destined to be that of the young and unfortunate Rocca. That life so threatened, that frail reed, which had served for a moment as a support to an existence apparently so strong, was still less frail than that existence itself. However, he did not long survive her. Sorrow, and carelessness of life, soon put an end to his short existence. He repaired to the fine climate of Provence, to breathe his last, and expired in the arms of a brother.

### *Society and Conversation.*

In her habitual society, Madame de Staël was full of charms. She had a simplicity of manners, and even an appearance of careless-

ness, that made every one feel at ease. In her company, there was no constraint. Circles, formal dissertations, wit on compulsion, did not please her: she was too fond in all things of what was unexpected, not to leave much to chance, and an animated and easy motion prevailed around her. Always observing, she never had an air of scrutinizing: and as her attention appeared turned to the subject of the discourse, rather than to the manner in which it was carried on by each individual, no one felt himself in the presence of a judge. Thus her superiority did not bear heavy on any person; she asked only for amusement, not for trials of skill.

Madame de Staël was graceful in all her motions. Her face, without satisfying the eye in every respect, first attracted, and then fixed it, because it had a very uncommon advantage as an organ of the mind: a sort of intellectual beauty, if we may use the term, suddenly displayed itself in it. Her thoughts painted themselves in succession so much the more distinctly in her countenance, that, except her eyes,

which were uncommonly fine, no very striking feature marked its character beforehand. She had none of those permanent expressions which ultimately mean nothing; and her physiognomy was created on the spot, as we may say, by her feelings. Perhaps when still, her eyelids were rather heavy, but genius suddenly sparkled in her eyes, her looks glowed with a noble fire, and announced like lightning the thunder of her words.

At the same time, she had neither in her countenance, nor in any feature, that restless mobility, which is so very equivocal an indication of intellect. A sort of exterior indolence rather prevailed in her; but her figure, a little inclined to stout, her striking and well-chosen postures, gave great energy and a singular weight to her discourse. There was something dramatic in her; and even her dress, though exempt from all singularity, was always more picturesque than fashionable.

When Madame de Staël entered a drawing-room her step was rather grave and solemn: a little timidity obliged her seriously to collect

herself, when she was about to attract every eye; and as this shade of embarrassment did not permit her to distinguish any thing at first, it seemed as if her countenance brightened up in proportion as she distinguished the persons about her. It was easy to presume that every name was inscribed on her memory by the hand of benevolence; and soon those charming words, of which she was so lavish, showed that the most distinguished actions and qualities of every one were present to her mind. Her praises came from the heart, and went to the heart, because they were expressed with sincerity. She praised without flattering; "politeness," according to Madame de Staël, "being nothing more than the art of making a selection from what one thinks." Perhaps acute eyes would have perceived a limit in all these eulogies; but she had such a real desire of obliging that no one cavilled at her expressions, and her cordiality imposed silence on self-love.

Whatever griefs were inwardly felt by Madame de Staël, she almost always carried into company that freedom of mind which alone en-

ables us to enjoy it. One cause of the vivacity and clearness of her conceptions was, that her mind was not too tenaciously pre-occupied. All her impressions came from without, and were in consequence perfectly just. Images were formed in her mind as on a perfectly smooth canvass; and their colours were still heightened by the slight tint of melancholy that was diffused over the ground. Hence it was that every object produced its full effect on her, and that she derived a real and infallible solace from social intercourse.

This solace, as I have already said, was necessary to her. The preservative instinct of her talents was averse to stagnation. Perhaps her constitution, more feeble than was supposed, required the stimulus of amusement; for a sort of terror seized her at the idea of life standing still. In her youth she could not endure solitude; and the melancholy impressions that are painted with so much beauty in her works, had with her a formidable reality. It was not till very late in life, and when she was able to keep at a distance the monsters created

by her imagination, that she was able, according to her own expression, "to live in company with nature."

Consequently *ennui*, which, in the world or elsewhere, is a solitude where we have not the company even of ourselves, was extremely dreaded by her. It was not sufficient for her that persons were witty; they must be animated: and perhaps those wits who would not take the trouble to amuse in society put her more out of humour than men of inferior talents. She could not endure people to talk with indifference. "How can he expect me to attend to him," she would say, "when he does not do himself the honour to attend to himself?" She could better endure certain defects of character than a mind dried up and disgusted; and she said one day of an egotist and caviller, "That man talks only of himself; but he does not tire me, because I am certain at least that he feels interested in what he says."

Accordingly, open-hearted gaiety was always welcome to Madame de Staël; and provided

this gaiety had nothing vulgar, or in a bad taste (an indispensible condition with Madame de Staël), she never quarrelled with it. There was a tenderness, a lively gratitude, in her feelings towards those who amused her: a *bon-mot*, a comic story, was to her a little benefit, of which she spoke with warmth; and she would have the circumstance that diverted her repeated to every new comer. Point, originality, imagination, pleased her above all: this gave spring to her wit, and wings to her genius. Prosing mediocrities, living repositories of trite ideas, models of the common routine of education, were as nothing in her eyes: what she could find in her library she could well dispense with in society. She did not require that every thing should be combined in every person: a single marked advantage pleased her more than a collection of inferior advantages; and having in herself the complement wanting to every one, she asked in others only certain salient thoughts, which she could form into a whole with her own. "My daughter wants an initial word," said Mr. Necker; and perhaps he was right:

but this initial word would have been null or absurd to any other. It was the basket over the acanthus leaf that gave rise to the invention of the Corinthian capital: it was the wall irregularly stained by damp that furnished subjects for the picture of a great painter.

This is the reason why she was so much enchanted with certain foreign authors. Lord Byron, in particular, was of inestimable value in her eyes. He called her whole imagination into play, and she formed a new creation on the conceptions of the poet. "Confess that your Richard Cœur de Lion will be a Lara," said I to her once. "Perhaps so," answered she, with a smile: "but I'll engage that nobody in the world will suspect it." In fact, she never imitated any thing; but seeds unperceived expanded themselves from her pen in an original form; and while she was continually enriching her stores from the intellect of others, she never displayed any but her own.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly, even in a purely mental view, her likings from her esteem. No person ever understood the value

of just proportions better than Madame de Staël: no person ever held in higher estimation, with respect to serious things, that justice, which arises from a due balance. Had she been called on to form an estimate, she would have assigned the highest rank to the most solid understanding. No one would have had any right to complain of his place in the scale; but the highest number was not always the most necessary to her.

She never failed, however, to be ultimately out of patience with absurdity, and of extravagance she was quickly weary. She always sought, and often found, the point of junction between imagination and good sense. "Folly," said she one day, "may be poetical, but irrationality is not."

The imprudent expressions, which Madame de Staël may have uttered, were much more frequently occasioned by *ennui*, than by impetuosity. When a state of languor appeared irremediable, it sometimes occurred to her, to produce a revolution in the society: she broke the ice of an insipid conversation by some bold

stroke, and scattered dismay among the grave, of various kinds. Then, for a moment or two, she might fail in circumspection; but the more animated she was, the more firm and secure was her step. Once fairly entered on her career, there was no longer any false movement. Certain of her strength, she ran through the centre of danger, handled as she passed the most hazardous questions, touched on the most delicate points, and made her friends tremble for her; the indifferent for themselves. No one was aware on whom the fire of this flying artillery would fall; people heard the ball whistle round them, and alarm passed from one to another: but soon every one was at ease: the desired modification or exception was introduced just at the proper point; a commendation suddenly raised him, who believed himself the object of attack; and she emerged in triumph from the difficulties which she had accumulated around her. There was fear mixed with the pleasure she gave; as there is in that we feel at seeing the performances of a rope-dancer.

But it was above all in disputation, that she shone most conspicuously. Her most impetuous vehemence was never accompanied with acrimony or contempt. Neither arrogance, irony, or sarcasm, could be imputed to her; and there was something flattering to her antagonist, even in the strength she deemed it necessary to display against him. If any improper expression escaped him, she reprimanded him with vivacity; but soon she considered him as pardoned, and went on. She loved people to employ all their weapons against her, and, in fact, the more fertile in resources they showed themselves, the more was her superiority confirmed. She had all the understanding of her adversary, and something more. When the question was exhausted, and the dispute threatened to become tedious, collecting her most victorious arguments, she thundered forth a kind of finale with a flourish, from which there was no appeal. The decision was always just, the vanquished had been handsomely treated; and she stopped just at the point where the opinions of all coincided.

This taste for animated conversation extended to those discussions, in which she took no part. She was amused, when people maintained with vivacity singular opinions of any sort, and every one took a pleasure in it. In her society the contests were desperate, furious thrusts were given, but they were quickly forgotten. Coppet was like that hall of Odin in the Scandinavian Paradise, where the warriors that were slain rose again upon their legs, and began the fight anew.

The variety of characters and understandings afforded a constant study to Madame de Staël. She had an occupation in society very different from that of shining and pleasing: she was the naturalist observing a species, as well as the orator that would persuade.

But what deranged this study completely, what took from her all interest in people's words, was affectation. This fault, which effaces every prominent feature, which substitutes a false and monotonous phantom, instead of the immense variety of moral nature, was profoundly tiresome to her, and scarcely less vexa-

tious. She expressed herself thus on the subject: "There is never any such thing as a *tête-à-tête* with affected people: the personage assumed makes a third, and it is this that answers, when you speak to the other.—Affected people are the only persons from whom nothing is to be learned." Exaggeration, too, displeased her much. "It is no proof of imagination to put a hundred in place of ten," she would say. For the same reason she was always suspicious of great expressions of sensibility: "All natural feelings," she remarked, "have a degree of modesty."

With Madame de Staël you were compelled, as it were, to speak the truth: not that you were sure of not hurting her, if you spoke frankly, but because the contrary was too insipid. It was better to quarrel with her, than to reduce yourself to a cipher; and, according to her own expression, she required above all, "that you should be somebody:" besides, she was desirous of being informed of every thing at any price; she thought, that a dislike to hear the truth was a certain sign of decay,

either in the mind, or in the temper. "I was aware that Bonaparte was declining," she said, "when I perceived that he no longer cared about knowing the true state of things."

She led the way too decidedly in this respect for others to avoid following it. She wrote once to her daughter, I forget on what occasion: "I am to blame for maintaining the truth too eagerly; but it is always the truth that sways me."

This taste for truth was also to her a source of indulgence, as it balanced the too great regard she might otherwise have had for wit. Wherever she found, I do not say merely a natural manner of expression, which is a beauty, but real feeling, a profound and intimate persuasion, she became interested. A woman entirely devoted to her children, or sincerely pious, a man full of honour and integrity, were agreeable to her on this account alone: she valued all kinds of knowledge, all direct experience: merchants, men of business, all, in short, who had learned to treat with their fellow men, and this, even among the lower class, fixed her attention,

and furnished her with food for thought. Human beings were the more estimable in her eyes, in proportion to the esteem they had for each other. She could be entertained by persons who were tiresome to all the world.

Madame de Staël was most deeply convinced of the equality of all creatures, the children of the Creator; and, though conscious of her own genius, never thought herself really above any one. In her disputes with Mr. Schlegel, she always maintained that there is no real difference between men, and that every thing is compensated. She never could endure those Eleusinian mysteries of distinguished persons, those initiations into pretended truths, which it is supposed beneficial to conceal from the vulgar. Accordingly, disdain was to her an object of antipathy; she saw in it a symptom of some secret inferiority. "I should not disdain the opinion," she said, "of the lowest of my domestics, if the least of my own impressions tended to justify it."

Even with regard to intellectual faculties, she was inclined to think, that what raises

distinguished persons above the general level is very trifling, compared with what they have in common with all well-organized beings. The universal effect produced by talents appeared to her to prove the great analogy between men's minds, and a fund of wealth common to all, by the side of which individual differences were of small account. "If people be stupid," says she, "it is always their own fault; and were I in possession of power, I would oblige every body to have intellect."

Neither could she bear that any one should think himself superior to others, because they did not understand him. As, in proportion as her talents expanded, she had corrected a little obscurity in her style, she had a right to say, that the higher we rise, the more readily we find the means of diffusing light over important subjects, and of being at once intelligible and profound.

*Conversation, Political Opinions, Repartees, continued.*

What contributed to set persons of the most moderate talents at their ease with Madame de Staël, was her delightful cheerfulness. Gaiety, that charming region in which minds of every degree meet, was her medium of communication with all. She established equality by an agreeable raillery, of which she was well pleased to be the object. She confessed that, next to her friends, what she most felt the want of in foreign countries was persons who understood pleasantry. With her, raillery was a sign of friendship; and when she said to any one, "As for you, you have nothing about you to laugh at," there was a sort of dryness in her tone.

It was unpleasant to her to feel that persons were afraid of her. Never losing sight of the well-founded interests of self-love, she recompensed the confidence with which people trusted themselves in her hands. Every one found himself embellished in the highly coloured portrait

she drew of him, a portrait at once striking and flattering, of which even the blemishes indicated were not without their charm.

One of the favourite subjects of Madame de Staël in conversation was the defence of the most pleasing gifts of nature against the kind of detraction, of which they are sometimes the object. Thus she could not suffer any one to speak ill of wit, or represent such an advantage as detrimental to sound sense, and consequently to happiness. Always taking the word wit *(esprit)* in its most extensive signification, she applied it to the highest degree of intelligence, to a clear view of things, to an appreciation of all their bearings; the inconveniences falsely attributed to wit, according to her, all proceed from the point where wit is defective. When she was told of the follies of some witty man, she would say: "Give him more wit, and all these will vanish." One of her Swedish friends observing to her, "Whatever you may say, witty people commit a great many faults:" she answered, "that is very true; but unfortunately, stupid persons do the same, though

nobody thinks it worth while to notice them." Another time she said: "The follies of men of wit are the profits of ordinary men."

In like manner she took up the defence of imagination, beauty, youth; and acquired advantages, even those derived from certain prejudices, also found in her an advocate. Thus wealth and illustrious birth had their value in her eyes. Those petty reasonings, the offspring of envy and the consolation of mediocrity; those sophisms, by which people attempt to prove, that advantages are no advantages; those sophisms, I say, did not please her: she found more real greatness in supporting privations, than in denying them.

"All this tends to death," said she, speaking of that negative philosophy, which yields up, one after another, the finest endowments, as well as the most innocent pleasures, lest we should suffer hereafter by their abuse, or from their loss. We disfigure, we render insipid, according to her, a conception of genius, when we obliterate the grand features of intellectual nature; and if she vaunted Christian morality,

it was because, in Christianity, death to the interests of this world is the sign of a new life, of a life immortal, in the heart's recesses.

In general Madame de Staël always embraced the simple, the positive side of a question; that which a child, or a savage, would have chosen in preference. People might amuse her by supporting paradoxes, but she herself almost always took the side of common sense. Besides that she could only speak from conviction, she thought more real wit capable of being displayed on the side of truth than on that of error; for it is not absolutely necessary to defend right reason by trite arguments. It is because Madame de Staël took care to have reason on her side, that time will increase her reputation. In proportion as men attend more to their true interests, the spirit of paradox should grow out of fashion.

Moral activity being at once a want and a system with Madame de Staël, no wonder she suffered much from her exile. It may be said she could employ her thoughts in retirement: and who knew this better than herself?

To employ the mind on general ideas, when the fate of all men is in a state of suspense, requires a degree of energy, of which she showed herself capable. But in her youth, particularly, study was not a sufficient resource against the chagrin of being separated from her friends, against that of being, with her father, the eternal object of injustice; and, above all, against the sorrow of seeing arbitrary power hovering over the destiny of that France, which she loved so passionately. "I have a corroding grief respecting France," she wrote, "which I love more than ever." And again, "I have felt clearly that I cannot live without that France." At the time when she was still permitted to live in a French province, it was a pleasure to her to hear the national accent in the smallest towns, and the idea that she was in France enabled her patiently to support insipid places of residence. But it must be confessed her country was more especially Paris.

"Show me the *rue du Bac*," said she once to some persons who wanted her to admire the

splendid view of the lake of Geneva and its banks. "I would willingly live at Paris," said she again, "with a hundred pounds a year, in a lodging up four pair of stairs." In 1806, when she spent four days in Paris in concealment, her greatest pleasure was to walk out at night, to view the streets by moonlight. "I have a constancy of heart," she wrote, "and an inconstancy of mind, for which a country is formed, where the scenes are incessantly renewing, and where I have my old friends."

However, after having been restored to this country so much regretted, she voluntarily exposed herself to exile anew; for she composed her last work in 1815; and before the 5th of September she was convinced that she could not publish it without being forced to quit France; yet this conviction did not deter her.

The political opinions of Madame de Staël were so much in the line of her character, that, her natural disposition being known, we could scarcely attribute to her any others. Her worship of liberty was at once Roman and Christian. She had that greatness of mind,

that hatred of tyranny, which characterized the ancients, and yet she felt a compassion altogether evangelical for the unhappy of inferior classes. She would not only have solaced, but have exalted in their own eyes, those who suffered most from the structure of society. And when to this double sentiment was added that of the most vivid sentiments of her heart; when all she admired in thought, and cherished among mortals, urged her on in the same track; it is not astonishing that liberal ideas infused themselves, as it were, into her heart's blood. Accordingly, she returned to the field of politics with powers still more expert, after her various talents had required her to treat of other subjects.

At a time when to write romances was scarcely permitted, and when she appeared to confine herself to simple literature, the great concerns of humanity were always indirectly the subjects of her conversation. Bonaparte was not deceived in this: he felt, as if instinctively, that all Madame de Staël said must be injurious to him. "I am told that she talks nei-

ther of politics nor of me," said he: "but I know not how it happens, people are always less fond of me after they have been in her company." "She gives people's thoughts a turn," he observed on another occasion, "that does not suit me." This was the true cause of the exile to which he condemned her: to which may be added, the success, independent of him, and consequently disagreeable to him, which Madame de Staël had at Paris.

She certainly maintained her political opinions with great vivacity, yet her vehemence had nothing in it of enmity. When she came into collision with some painful feeling she perceived it in an instant, because there was always in her heart some disposition analogous to that of her adversary. Thus the past, the worship of our fathers, melted her, and every religious feeling touched her heart. That brilliant creation of barbarous times, the spirit of chivalry, in which all that moral nature had of grand and noble seems formerly to have taken refuge amid the general disorganization, pleased her singularly, and the example of

England convinced her that it was capable of being combined with liberty. Great names were to her living history, and spoke to her imagination. That class, whose recollections we find it difficult to pardon—that class, whose regrets are legitimate, if their pretensions be not, and whose misfortunes we may pity without wishing them to be triumphant—that class and its fate always occupied an important place in the thoughts of Madame de Staël. She could not forget that her earliest friends were among the ancient nobility, and that her first pleasant days had dawned in their circle. Though, as well as her father, the object of their eternal resentment, it required all their injustice, and occasionally their haughty asperity, to combat a degree of sympathy that she felt with them. Assuredly neither the principles nor the interests of Madame de Staël could lead her to wish success to their cause: but her heart experienced something very painful in the idea of their sorrows; what she did to serve them is well known; and it was even for the purpose of serving them that

she took so much pains to convince them. She beheld the course of affairs, the irresistible force of events. "Avoid," she seemed to say to them, "avoid an useless struggle; do not break yourselves against iron necessity: the times, futurity, fate, have passed the decree. In the name of Heaven give way to Time as he advances: do not suffer yourselves to be crushed beneath the wheels of his car."

It is very remarkable, that, always cutting to the quick in disputation, always touching the most sensible points, she always conciliated in her presence those whom a vague idea of her had previously made her enemies. You might be grazed, be wounded, in the contest; but you always went away healed, or at least she had applied balsam to the sore.

"You desire then my death or my dishonour?" said an emigrant to her in Switzerland, as he was going to the army on the frontiers. "No," answered she: "what I wish is your defeat, and your glory: I would have you, except being slain, be like Hector, the hero of a vanquished army."

It was curious to see her turn round upon her own auxiliaries, when they defended her opinions by blameable means, or infringed the laws of that benevolence which was the natural instinct of her heart. Her attachment to truth led her to justice, and hence to moderation. Thus a man, known under more than one of our governments, having said, after the battle of Waterloo, that Bonaparte had neither talents nor courage, she answered him: "It is degrading both the French nation and Europe a little too much, to assert that, for fifteen years, they were at the beck of a fool and a coward."

Extravagant opinions found as little favour with Madame de Staël as violence of character. Every extreme had a tendency to impel her to its opposite, and if she ever seemed to deviate from her track, it is in this we must seek for its explanation. Thus, to religious bigots she may have sometimes appeared an infidel; to the worshippers of arbitrary power, a democrat; and to the levellers, an aristocrat: but those oscillations did not extend to the bottom; they were only the sudden effect of the great counterpoise,

which she thought herself called upon to place on that side, where reason required it.

Madame de Staël so little imagined it possible to entertain hatred for opinions, that she answered the sharpest attacks without suspecting any hostile intention. But if she suddenly happened to discover any real malevolence, ready as she was at repartee, she was completely disconcerted, and no longer herself. In her youth she has burst into tears, when she has met with any malignity: and if her pride better supported her at a subsequent period, hatred always occasioned her astonishment, and a kind of stupefaction. "I have no strength with the malicious," she said; "as I simply give them a moral blow with the fist, if indeed I am able to do that." Not recognizing her fellow-creatures in those who sought to wound, she would have nothing to do with a strange and ferocious species. The woman was always perceivable in Madame de Staël, by the want she felt of being an object of affection.

The first time she was exiled, in 1803, she wrote among other memorandums made for her

own private use: "On passing the Rhine, I thought much of my friends; but I do not know that the remembrance of my enemies ever came across my mind: I have always considered hatred, when I have been its object, as a sort of extraordinary and transitory accident. I believe its existence only from its effects, so little do I understand its nature. When I meet an enemy, I am tempted to say to him: 'Do you seriously hate me? Are you then ignorant that my heart is a stranger to every bitter feeling?'"

After having lived through a revolution so violent, she has said, a thousand times, that she felt neither animosity nor revenge; and indeed never was she heard to wish a real evil to any person. Accordingly she forgot all differences of opinion with the successive victims of the different reigns of tyranny. "My house is the hospital of vanquished parties," she observed.

"There is a sort of physical enjoyment," she said, "in resistance to unjust power."

Latterly it may have been thought, that political discussions occupied too great a share of

Madame de Staël's conversation; and of this Mr. Schlegel bitterly complained. But as she was deeply convinced that men's characters are wholly formed by the institutions under which they live, it appeared to her, that every thing good and great must be the result of a good organization of society. "To study politics," said she, "is religion, morality, and poetry together."

I shall here quote at random a few *bon-mots* of Madame de Staël, on public events, because, if they be not all remarkable in themselves, they are at least characteristic.

While she was in England, in 1814, some person thought fit to congratulate her on the taking of Paris, which put an end to her banishment. To these expressions of politeness she answered: "On what do you compliment me, pray? On my being in the height of distress?" It was from the date of the battle of Leipsic that she began to be alarmed for France.

In 1815, when Bonaparte had already entered Lyons, a lady, attached to his party, came and said to Madame de Staël: "The emperor

knows, Madame, how generously you spoke of him during his misfortunes." "I hope," answered she, "he will know how much I detest him."

During the hundred days, she said: "If all the declamatory phrases, uttered this winter against the revolution, had been enlisted, we should have had plenty of soldiers on the 20th of March."

In 1816, Mr. Canning having thought proper to say to Madame de Staël, in the apartment of the first gentleman of the bed-chamber in the palace of the Tuileries: "It is useless to indulge any longer in illusions, Madam: France has submitted to us, and we have conquered you." "Yes," answered she, "because you had all Europe and the Cossacs on your side: but meet us *tête-à-tête*, and we shall see." She said also to Mr. Canning: "The English nation is deceived: it is not aware that it is employed to deprive other nations of the liberty enjoyed by itself, and to protect intolerance toward its brethren in religion: if it knew this, it would renounce those who thus abuse its name."

The occupation of France by foreigners was a source of bitter chagrin to Madame de Staël; she determined to quit Paris in 1817, and not to return till the allied armies had departed. She wrote to her son-in-law, the Duke de Broglie: "A great share of happiness in private life is necessary to enable us to support the situation of France with respect to foreigners."

"France," said she, "must remain as dead, as long as it is occupied by foreigners. First let us have independence, and then think of liberty."

She said of Mr. De Bonald, "He is the philosopher of antiphilosophy; but this will not carry a man very far."

"The ministerial party," observed she, "looks at the prosaic side of human nature, and opposition at the poetical side. This is why I have always had an inclination for the opinions of the latter."

Some person once maintained that it was impossible for ministers of state to confine themselves to the employment of strictly legitimate measures. "What would you have me

say?" answered she: "he who possesses genius can never have occasion for immorality; and he who has not, should not accept a post of difficulty."

In 1816 she said of the ministry: "I do not like it, yet I prefer it. It is but a barrier of cotton against the return of old abuses, yet still it is a barrier."

On occasion of the great number of persons ennobled, she said: "It would be best to create France a marquis once for all."

She set no great value on puns, yet she occasionally uttered them with her usual quickness. In a dispute on the slave trade with a French lady of high rank, the latter said to her: "What, madam, then you are much interested for the count of Limonade and the marquis of Marmalade?" "Why not as much as for the duke of Bouillon?" answered she.

Bonaparte having caused her to be told, in 1815, that she must return to Paris, because he wanted her for the sake of constitutional ideas, she refused, saying: "He contrived to do

without a constitution, and without me, for a dozen years; and he has now the same regard for the one that he has for the other." Even at this period, however, when any Frenchmen passed by Coppet in their way to join the army of the allies, she endeavoured to divert them from their design, not approving their endangering the independence of the nation, even to acquire liberty.

She was already dangerously ill, when the "Manuscript from St. Helena" began to make a great noise in France. Notwithstanding the state of weakness to which Madame de Staël was reduced, she made her children read the work to her, and criticised it with all her strength of mind. "The Chaldeans worshipped the serpent," said she: "the Bonapartists do the same to the Manuscript from St. Helena; but I am far from sharing their admiration. It is but in the style of the notes of the *Moniteur*; and if ever I recover, I think I can refute this writing with a high hand."

I shall conclude with a general remark on the effect of Madame de Staël's conversation. Setting aside political opinions, on which a

perfect agreement has not yet taken place, it is certain that her influence was always salutary. Her strongest indignation was not only expressed against every reprehensible expression, whether it regarded religion or morality; but no doubtful or equivocal sentiments could stand in her presence, in which people appeared, at least for a moment, sincerely to abjure every thing vain, puerile, or selfish. It was necessary to avow their motives to themselves and others; and every one was compelled to that examination of his own movements, which is always so beneficial to delicate consciences. Life was much simplified with Madame de Staël: in her eyes every thing was reduced to duty, glory, affection, or pleasure; and pretences crumbled into dust before her.

Besides, she never acted on others except through the medium of their qualities. She never assailed any one by ignoble interests, by low and personal motives, for she was convinced that there is a principle of generosity at the bottom of every heart, to which we ought to address ourselves. Different in this from her

father, if I may venture to say so, who had a sufficient contempt for individuals, but a high idea of human nature at large, Madame de Staël spoke to nations of their interests, and to individuals of their virtues, and she was so much the better understood by both.

This no doubt was one of the reasons of the extraordinary tenderness with which she inspired all around her: her children, the domestics, the poor whom she assisted, all felt their existence ennobled near her. On each she conferred enjoyments before unknown; and, as she seemed to hold out a higher degree of affection as the reward of every generous effort, to the happiness of self-esteem was added that of being beloved by her.

## *Way of Life, Business, Studies, Correspondence, Private Theatricals.*

A long period elapsed before Madame de Staël could confine herself to a regular employment of her time. After she was forced to live

in retirement, she felt the great utility of a methodical distribution of her occupations; not only finding, that it was the means of doing more, but having also observed, that in a life bare of events, the monotony of each day lulls and suppresses, as it were, too great activity of the mind.

Nevertheless she was not rigid in the rules she imposed on herself, and contracted no pertinacious habit. The mechanism of human organization was never less felt than by Madame de Staël: no blind power swayed her; and, whenever occasion required it, she could instantly change her way of life. Having very few ordinary wants, a stranger to languor and discouragement, she was never tired of acting or thinking. Heat, cold, changes of season, had no influence on her. If she had great need of moral activity, bodily exercise was by no means necessary to her. Accordingly, she had little faith in weakness of the nerves, and despised any minute attentions to health. "I might have been sick like other people," said she to me one day, "if I had

not vanquished physical nature." But, alas! this nature will never allow us the last word.

Her mornings she devoted to business, that is, to the care of her property and to study; and her evenings to society, or to correspondence. I shall proceed to consider her for a moment in some of these points of view.

Notwithstanding the liberality and noble facility of Madame de Staël's disposition, great order was observed in the management of her house and estate; so that her circumstances were constantly prosperous while under her government. She was offended with those who supposed she had no head for common affairs, because she had a great deal of genius: and as it frequently happened that her debtors told her, as if they considered it as a matter of course with a person of such distinction, that they would not pay her, this sort of homage irritated her extremely. Considering a superior intellect as suited to every thing, she would have thought herself possessing less, if she had not known how to take care of her patrimony. She would not have been inacces-

sible to the care of fortune, and her imagination would readily have busied itself in afflictions of this sort. During the course of the revolution she was frequently afraid of being ruined; and then, the idea that she could maintain her children by her labours supported her; and she entered into accurate calculations on this head. Subsequently she required of her son to exert great perseverance in the recovery of her property; but in all her advice on the subject dignity and philosophy were conspicuous. "Do not torment yourself whether you are successful or not," she wrote to him: "do what you ought, happen what may: whatever does not touch the heart leaves life free."

One of Bonaparte's ministers having desired her to be told, that the emperor would reward her if she would attach herself to him, she answered, "I was aware that a certificate of being alive is necessary to the receipt of an annuity, but I did not know that it required a declaration of love."

What was essential to Madame de Staël in

money matters was, to have nothing to blame herself for. In consequence, superfluous expenses displeased her; and while she was very fond of procuring pleasure, she allowed nothing to vanity. Some person one day wished to make her ashamed of her chamber at Coppet having no ceiling, so that the joists were seen. "Are the joists visible?" said she: "I had never observed it. Allow me this year, when so many people are in want, to be satisfied with those fancies of which I am sensible."

The only luxury on which she set any value was the having sufficient accommodation for her friends, and being able to invite to dinner persons with whom she wished to become acquainted. "I have hired a cook, that travels post," said she: "is not this exactly what I wanted, to give dinners in dishabille throughout Europe?"

Madame de Staël was singularly amiable and arch, when she gave an account of the impressions produced in her by any thing in active life. She was amused at observing the little tricks of low people, their way of thinking, and the cunning of the peasantry. She took

almost a childish pleasure in certain trifling details, and fancied she had made an apartment look quite superb, when she had had it new papered.

Her manner of employing herself was consistent with all the rest, and she displayed no pedantry in her profession of an author. Study and composition were necessary resources to Madame de Staël, the means of calming and tempering her agitated mind, and of maintaining it at its proper height. The means and the end were equally suited to her nature; and yet her friends were incessantly committing the fault of interrupting her occupations, because they were always welcome to her. There is no instance, even when she was writing with the greatest fire and rapidity, of her having testified any thing but pleasure on seeing those enter of whom she was fond.

From her earliest youth she had acquired a habit of suffering interruption cheerfully. As Mr. Necker had forbidden his wife to write, lest he should be embarrassed by the idea of incommoding her on entering her apartment, Mademoiselle Necker, who did not wish to

draw upon herself such a prohibition, had accustomed herself to write as it were flying; so that seeing her always standing or leaning on a corner of the mantel-piece, her father could never suppose that he was interrupting her in any serious employment. To such a degree did she respect this little foible of Mr. Necker, that she had not the slightest accommodation for writing in her apartment till long after she had lost him. At last, when Corinna had made a great noise in foreign countries, she said to me, "I have a great desire to have a large table; I think I have a right to one now."

For an author to accommodate himself to such a desultory mode of writing, would require a heart as greedy of friendship as that of Madame de Staël, and a presence of mind not less. She could resume the course and progress of her ideas at will. There was nothing fortuitous in her genius, and she could have written pages of the greatest eloquence at any moment. In her might be observed the double faculty of not losing sight of an object, and

of not being too much pre-occupied by it. Accordingly, she often turned the conversation to the subject of a work she had undertaken, in order to try the effect of her own ideas, and to collect those of others: but this was done unsuspectedly, and often, indeed, without any particular design on her part, but merely from the habit of thinking aloud in company with her friends.

I could never comprehend how she found time for meditating her works. The manner of her life sufficiently proves that she did not devote any particular time to reflection. She always related to me the plan of her next work, and we discussed this plan in detail. Once, at Geneva, I happened to say to her; "But, as you sleep all night, and are talking or doing something all day, when could you think of this plan?" "When? why in my sedan-chair," said she, laughing. Now, she was never longer than five minutes in this sedan; yet she had settled the titles and subject of every chapter.

In consequence, there were few moments of

her life when she totally gave up labour. Her faculties most commonly predominated over her grief: and, as what she wrote always bore some relation to her sorrows, she could still write, when reading was insufficient to call off her thoughts from them. "I comprehend nothing of what I read," she said, "and so I am obliged to write."

But if her mind loved to form literary schemes, on the other hand it very quickly lost sight of her old productions. "When a work is once printed," said she, "I trouble myself about it no farther: it makes its own way as well as it can." Except *Delphine*, which she reviewed carefully, because she had been censured on the score of the moral effect of this novel, I do not think that she ever read over one of her own books; she even thought of them so little that she forgot them all in succession. When an expression in them was quoted to her she was astonished, and said: "Did I indeed write that? I am quite charmed with it; it is excellently well expressed." Two of her friends, in concert, once remodelled her

chapter on love, in *The Influence of the Passions*, substituting divine, in the room of terrestrial, love. When they read this piece to her she listened to the end with the utmost attention, quite enchanted, and eager to learn the name of the author.

Her extreme dislike to recur to old ideas had some share in the magnanimity she displayed in never answering any criticisms. If any one had threatened her with destroying all her works already published, she would have been little alarmed. The oracles once uttered, she would readily, like the sybil, have allowed the wind to blow away the oak leaves.

In fact, to write was more necessary to her than to publish; she was very patient under the seizure of her work on *Germany*; and when she was told that General Savary had sent the edition to the mill, in order to be converted into paste-board, "I wish, at least," she answered, "that he would send me the paste-board for my bonnets."

Never author lived less attentive to literary fame, or less intoxicated by success. In the

enjoyments of her self-gratification there was always some sad reflection on the rest of her fate; and she seemed to say of this kind of pleasure, "Is this all?"

However, she by no means affected to disavow her fame or her claims to it. She was conscious of her superiority, and has sometimes said of an author mentioned to her, "He is not my equal; and if ever we enter into a contest, he will come out of it limping." When yet very young, and at a time when she had rather a presentiment than any proof of her strength, I have heard her carry her hopes so high that I have much doubted her ever realizing them. Her auditors might sometimes be astonished at certain phrases, not often used, which she uttered with the greatest simplicity: "With all the understanding I possess, with my talents, my reputation," &c. She frequently repeated to her friends the praises she received in letters, but there was an extreme good-nature in her self-love. It was not always present; and when it was, it said frankly, "Here I am." What renders vanity really insufferable is its being

suddenly discovered in the place of sentiment, or of dignity of character. When it candidly avows itself for what it is, and is destitute of arrogance and disdain, it is not a predominant principle in the mind.

Besides, Madame de Staël's moments of vanity were short: praise gave her pleasure, but some new flash of talent or sensibility soon shone forth in her. Another proof that her self-love had nothing in it of rudeness, is, as she has said a thousand times, that commendations always afforded her more satisfaction, than criticisms gave her pain.

If the letters of Madame de Staël have been much vaunted, it is because they exhibited an image of herself, though a feeble one. It does not appear to me that she had, like Madame de Sevigné, a peculiar talent for the epistolary style, one of those supernatural gifts, which seem almost independent of a person's faculties. Her letters did not equal her conversation either in genius or fire: she displayed no wit in them but what she could not avoid; but even this was unquestionably a great

deal. A charming sensibility and a pleasing tinge of melancholy pervaded them, which were alternately their merit and their defect. For the rest, she considered letters only as indispensible means of communication, and never considered them in a literary view. "Since I have openly sought celebrity by my works, I have ceased to pay any attention to my letters," said she: accordingly, she often employed, for her correspondence, the time when she was in company, and wrote while she took her share in the conversation.

The most remarkable of Madame de Staël's letters, next to those addressed to her father, were those written to her intimate friends. Her long correspondence with me is a treasure of friendship and candour; not less a source of tears than of happiness, for the remainder of my life. The letters which she wrote in moments of anxiety, indignation, or grief, are exceedingly remarkable. In these, hurried on by an imperious sentiment, she filled, without thinking of it, page after page with the most admirable eloquence.

I cannot give the same praise to the letters which Madame de Staël wrote on the impulse of a transient enthusiasm, or without any real emotion. In letters of this kind, she was not always exempt from a little exaggeration; and they sometimes betrayed the talent of the novelist, who takes advantage of the impression of the moment, or of a chimerical supposition, to produce effect, and who cannot resist the temptation of splendid colouring. Thus a feeble and evanescent tinge of what was interesting rapt her into the ideal world of sentiment, and she grew warm by what she might have felt. She has even said, that, when she took a pen in hand, her imagination was heated; and mentioned, that her mother having employed her, at the age of fourteen, to write a letter to an old family friend, she used such warm and passionate expressions, that it was necessary to make her recommence her letter three times before the style was sufficiently sobered to admit of its being sent.

Madame de Staël was acquainted with the best part of European literature, without ever

having spent any considerable time in study. She read quickly, but not superficially; and never passed over any thing interesting, or wasted a minute on what was useless. She judged by genius, if we may so say; a sure tact soon disclosed to her the mind, the character, and the secret design of an author; and this knowledge she afterward applied in forming a judgment of the work. Thus no merit in the execution could reconcile her to a work, the object or sentiments of which were equivocal in point of morality, or in which there was a sterility of ideas; and it was always with regard to their qualities as men, that she estimated the merit of writers. And as style, according to her, displays the individual in his proper colours, she always read foreign authors in the original; and had the courage, even when arrived at years of maturity, to learn languages that she had not been taught in her youth. She set an infinite value on studies of this kind, finding that the thoughts open for themselves new roads, by a change of idiom. To learn and appreciate languages, in her opinion,

was the most beneficial of all exercises to the mind, and the only means of acquiring a knowledge of national character. She quoted with much pleasure the saying of the ancient poet Ennius, who averred that he had three minds, because he spoke three languages.

Once she was asked what book she would choose, if she were confined to the possession of one. After excepting the Bible, and the *Course of Religious Morals* of her father, she said, that for the sake of thought she would take Bacon, as the author who seemed to her most inexhaustible.

In the regions of pure literature, she considered nothing but effect. Of difficulties overcome she thought nothing; beauty was what she required: but there was no kind of beauty to which she was insensible. Extremely susceptible to the charms of sound, she repeated with rapture harmonious words or phrases. Certain lyric stanzas yielded her a pleasure totally independent of their signification; and, after having pompously recited them, she would exclaim: "There is poetry! and what I admire in it is,

it does not contain a single idea." She bantered herself on this head very gracefully, and said that she could never hear the following line repeated without tears in her eyes:

"*Votre nom? Moncassin.—Votre pays? La France.*"
"What's your name? Moncassin. Your native land? France."

She also quoted this phrase: "*Les orangers du royaume de Grenade et les citronniers des rois Maures:*" "The orange trees of the kingdom of Grenada, and the lemon trees of the Moorish monarchs;" as producing a great effect on her.

Thus the pleasures of literature, and even those of the world, were to her what they were to no one else: there was emotion, and, if we may venture to say it, talent in every thing she felt. A band of music, a dance, had a striking effect on her: at the sound of a paltry street-organ she was in raptures. Once, when she saw Mademoiselle Bigottini dance a minuet, she was enchanted, and said to her daughter: "While she was dancing, I could have wished the ancient *régime* to be restored."

But, to return to her literary tastes, works of imagination transported her beyond conception. In this respect she had impressions of extraordinary vivacity; and when she made any discovery of this kind, she spoke of it incessantly. She could not avoid giving her friends the passages to read that had struck her, and her joy was quite an event in her circle. René, the episode of Velleda, in the *Martyrs;* the scene of the burial, in the *Antiquary;* and the first poems of Lord Byron; gave her inexpressible emotion, and for a time renewed her existence.

This great sensibility gave her a very sure tact in literature, because she was certain that what did not affect her had no real beauty. "That is very well;" she said sometimes of certain pieces: "but it has nothing taking," or, "there is nothing impressive in it. You may trust my observation as to its effect, for I am the multitude in regard to imagination."

Accordingly, she was never deceived with regard to the future success of a work. Her advice to men of letters was always remarkable,

because she possessed the most accurate knowledge of the abilities of the author, of the style adapted to the subject, and of the disposition of the nation, or public at large, for which the work was intended. She spoke to those writers, who consulted her, with that energetic frankness, which her superiority, her sex, and particularly the extreme interest she took in their success, gave her a right to show.

Unquestionably, the vanity of some irritable persons may have been hurt by her remarks: but she had such a lively perception of every excellence, that she sent those away full of hope, who had been for a moment depressed by her sincerity. Frequently she has discovered and cherished opening talents, that were unconscious of their own existence. Nothing inflamed emulation like her encouragement: and when any of her friends entered the lists, with what vivacity, what fire, did she strive to serve them! how eagerly did she wish to see them reap the highest advantage from their talents, their subject, their slightest thoughts! When she examined their writings in concert with

them, no detail was too minute for her patience. She pointed out the slightest infringements of elegance or precision, entering occasionally into the nicest grammatical distinctions; and she frequently displayed such sagacity, such acuteness of imagination, that these discussions were highly interesting even to a third person.

Not only did her society and conversation together furnish those distinguished persons, who lived in her circle, with great opportunities for display; but her direct advice was of extreme advantage to them; and I do not think there is one among them who would venture to maintain, that he would ever have reached the height at which he has subsequently arrived, had it not been for her.

And I, who here attempt to trace this feeble sketch of her—I, who, devoid at once of youth and experience, venture to write for the first time—have need of her every moment; I interrogate her at every line; I know not whether I express what I feel, but still the hope of her approbation is the chimera that supports me.

Of the fine arts, music was the most habitually necessary to Madame de Staël. A performer herself, and endowed with a fine and strong voice, she continued to exercise her talent, till her children were able to afford her that sort of amusement which she required from harmony. She sought in it at once tranquillity and inspiration, forgetfulness of the present, and the anticipation of a future existence. This art, which sets the mind in motion, without the assistance of thought, and excites tender emotions without stirring the passions, had for Madame de Staël a charm, that nothing else could supply.

Music of all kinds, however, did not please her. Airs, the rhythm and melody of which are conspicuous, alone made any impression on her. Scientific music, ingenious music, were dumb to her: and when I remarked to her, that certain passages, full of point and originality, which are so numerous in the compositions of Haydn, produce an effect on us very analogous to that of wit, she answered; "I should like much better to hear the wit expressed in

words." She was vexed, as if her expectations were disappointed, at every thing that was not affecting to her; but then she sometimes felt inconceivable raptures. I have seen her melt into tears on hearing the romance of Marie Stuart performed on wind instruments; and as lively impressions had a creative power in her, the idea of her finest passages has been suggested to her as from on high, while hearing certain sublime or affecting airs.

But of all social amusements, that of theatrical performances was what she most highly enjoyed; and without here adverting to the pleasure that the *chefs-d'œuvres* of the drama, performed by the greatest actors, must have given to a person of such sensibility, and of an imagination so susceptible, I shall speak of the delight she enjoyed as an actress amid the little friendly troop which she herself had formed. To act tragedy in particular; to excite profound emotions by divine language; to render ourselves so far in harmony with the sentiments of a numerous audience, that a look, a gesture, a tone of voice, should go to the bottom of every

heart; was, according to Madame de Staël, an expansion of existence, an exalted and sympathetic enjoyment, of which nothing can give an idea.

In reality, her acting had great effect. The enthusiasm she felt impressed on her countenance a striking and lofty character; the lustre of her white arms, her noble and graceful gestures, her picturesque attitudes, and her look, alternately melancholy and penetrating, ardent, yet always natural, gave to her whole person a kind of beauty congenial to the art, and such as the tragic poet would have chosen; her sonorous and flexible voice filled the room; and never was the attention of spectators more forcibly fixed.

It is true she had not the talents of an actress by profession, but her performance was spirited and pathetic in the highest degree: she drew abundance of tears, and the truth of her expression moved the very bottom of the heart. Her whole troop was electrified by her: an assemblage in some degree heterogeneous was harmonized under her influence;

and on her little stage she transformed all her friends into heroes, as in conversation she converted every speaker into a man of wit.

As she declaimed by inspiration, her mode of acting a part varied from one representation of it to another. Liable to be tired of effects that were expected beforehand, she took a pleasure in alternately deceiving and surpassing expectation. Consequently, she often threw into shade those celebrated expressions that are considered as the test of talent, and brought forward others, previously little noticed, with such brilliancy, that she made them appear sublime. Thus deviating every moment from theatrical routine, she found means of being original in what every body knew by heart.

Her emotion in acting tragedy was very great: thus in Zara, for instance, she could never learn to take off her cross without breaking it. But this emotion produced no irregular effect on the spectators, and seemed to be a source of energy, rather than of perturbation, to herself: she had the most perfect presence of mind in the various incidents of the scene,

and did not lose the command of herself or of others.

But nothing was more entertaining than to see her act in comedy: all her fire, all her gaiety, shone forth in these performances. The parts of waiting-maids particularly delighted her: and there was something comic in the contrast itself, which she and all of us felt, between the little intrigues and interested cunning of the character, and the lofty thoughts and sentiments of the actress.

Perhaps she allowed *herself* to be a little too perceptible in every part to be compatible with the perfection of acting: she rather converted the characters into herself, than herself into the characters she performed; and it is astonishing, that she was able to exhibit all the shades of characters the most opposite to her own, still remaining Madame de Staël perfectly to the life: but she was thus in her writings and thus in society, always varying, always herself.

There were parts, however, which she never caught properly. When, for instance, a cha-

racter recalled to her mind a certain ideal personage, on which it had long been occupied, she modelled it by this ideal, without paying any regard to the differences. Thus, whenever she would act or compose a Nina, she always failed. She imitated only the poetic delirium, and represented a Sappho or a Corinna. Real madness, incoherence of thought, she could never comprehend: her head was too well organized fundamentally to conceive it.

This reminds me of an anecdote, that will display Madame de Staël in another point of view. About twenty years ago, when on a visit to me in the country, it was proposed to play *proverbs*. A sketch of Carmontel, entitled *Le Bavard* (The Prater), was selected, in which a great lady, ill and nervous, consents to use her interest in favour of an old soldier, who is soliciting a pension; but on the express condition that he states his case to her in the fewest words possible. The prater, who is duly cautioned beforehand, nevertheless indulges himself in such an exuberance of words, that he exhausts the pa-

tience of his patroness, and she will have nothing more to say to him. Madame de Staël represented the great lady. At first she acted her part very well; she counterfeited languor to perfection, next weariness, then vexation and impatience; but when the moment came for inflicting pain on the old soldier, it was impossible for her to bring herself to this. He had spoken of his wife and children; he was at bottom one of the best men in the world; it required too hard a heart to refuse him. Quitting, therefore, altogether her assumed character, and totally destroying the point of the piece, she told him with real emotion, that in future he had better not talk so much, but that for this time she would undertake his suit. Such in fact was Madame de Staël; she was not only incapable of giving pain to any person voluntarily, but, subject as she was to *ennui*, she really felt none when she could be useful to others.

The lively and pointed gaiety that animated the conversation of Madame de Staël having left only some scattered traces in her writings,

it is gratifying to perceive the expression of it in the little dramas that she composed for her private theatre. These pieces were full of originality, and the favourite ideas of the authoress were displayed in them travestied with great pleasantry.

Thus we have in one a Corinna in low life, a signora Fantastici, a musician, actress, poetess, who arrives at a little town in Switzerland, where for two centuries every person had done just the same things day after day. First she turns the head of one of the sons of the family where she lodges, then of another, then of the father, then of the mother herself, and lastly even that of the commissary sent to arrest her, and finally carries all these personages off with her to Italy. In another, we have a coxcomb, who exchanges the portrait of his mistress for two copies of his own; who declines the hand of a woman of great wit and elegance, because she outshines him in company; and concludes with asking in marriage a person of the most unpretending merit, who unfortunately turns out to be nothing but a painter's model.

Of all these little pieces, that which displays most comic power is a comedy without any decided plot, entitled *Captain Kernadec.* The humour of such a piece cannot be given in an extract, which would have only the improbability of the leading idea. But wherever good actors are to be found, a judgment may be formed of the original effect of this trifle on the stage.

Madame de Staël composed also some serious dramas, on subjects taken from the Bible, or the Lives of the Saints. The pathetic beauty of her style, the grandeur, and I will add the sincerity of her sentiments, were all required to make her feel assured that she could give a religious turn to the whole of an assembly prepared for pleasure, and that she should not have equally to dread the indifference and the scruples of her judges. This difficulty was perhaps so much the greater, as the spectators felt it beforehand; yet she always triumphed over it. She appeared so touched to the heart; there was so much sweetness in her manner, so much modest and noble candour in a sort of

confused application of her characters to herself, that the audience were softened from the commencement. This mother, these children, who were the principal actors in these pieces, were affecting in a thousand respects; and a series of enchanting pictures, which Madame de Staël had the art of introducing, diffused a powerful magic over the whole. "*Hagar in the Desert*," among others, a drama which Mademoiselle de Staël had, when only six years old, embellished with all her charms in acting the part of the little Ishmael, afforded a succession of attitudes and groups worthy the pencil of the greatest artists.

One of these dramas, the most striking of all perhaps for the antique and oriental colouring of its style, "*The Shunamite*," afforded occasion for a singular display of character in Madame de Staël, and showed us how her talents were capable of reacting on herself. She had sought to paint maternal vanity in the person of a woman, who, having obtained from heaven the unexpected happiness of becoming a mother, is too much intoxicated with delight at the bril-

liant endowments that have been lavished on her daughter, and cannot bring herself to perform the promise she had made of devoting the child to the service of the Lord. A very striking scene exhibited the punishment of the Shunamite. At a period which ought to have been peculiarly sacred to this mother, she had prepared a worldly feast, at which her daughter was to appear in great splendour. Already the fine voice of the daughter had been heard, already she had begun to display her accomplishments in a figure-dance; when on a sudden she faints and sinks to the ground, as if touched by the hand of death, in the midst of her companions. This situation, the whole force of which Madame de Staël had probably not foreseen, made such an impression on her, that the next day her daughter, who had acted the part of the young damsel, having been seized with a slight indisposition, she was in a state of the most violent anxiety, and fancied she had drawn upon herself the misfortune of the Shunamite.

From these slight productions we may infer, that Madame de Staël had a high degree of

talent for theatrical effect: a talent difficult to analyse, since it does not appear to depend on any appreciable quality, and is connected no doubt with a particular turn of the imagination. Her pieces always made a greater impression at their rehearsal, than when read, and at their performance, than at their rehearsal: the more numerous the audience, the more striking and powerful was their effect. In like manner her works always struck us more when printed, than they did in manuscript; and the more widely they have been diffused, the more they have gained in the opinions of their first judges. She had the art of seizing minds on a great scale; and possessed the gift of acting upon people in a body.

When we reflect on the claims Madame de Staël had to solid glory, we may be surprised at the prodigious interest she took in these theatrical exhibitions: but she found in these what was most agreeable to her in all her successes, the certainty of her sentiments being congenial with those of others, and the pleasure of causing certain chords to vibrate strongly at

the bottom of their hearts. Beyond this, glory had nothing more to offer her. It was in the eyes of her contemporaries that she loved to read the presage of that rank which future ages would accord her, and she enjoyed the present moment, as if she had not hoped for immortality.

## *Effects of Time.*

An intelligent Swede, who has sketched the portrait of Madame de Staël, says, that every year of her life was morally better than the preceding, as the latest of her works was always the most perfect both in matter and style. Since then the features I have exhibited belong chiefly to her youth, I think it of importance to point out the changes that gradually took place in Madame de Staël.

In the first place, she became more unaffected as she grew older. To the sincerity of character, which she always possessed, she added more and more truth of expression. There are minds that show themselves more openly at the commencement of life: there are

others that seem as if enveloped in the shining vapours of their own illusions. Madame de Staël was more herself as she advanced in years; whether, as she wrote to me, success encouraged her to display what she called her whimsicalities, or whether she had laid aside certain romantic forms that veiled her real originality. Perhaps there was a time when life, death, melancholy, impassioned disregard of self, were too prominent in her conversation; but, when the contagion of these phrases had infected her whole drawing-room, and threatened to extend to her anti-chamber, she grew mortally tired of them. The affectation of these imitators constantly cured Madame de Stael of any thing ridiculous. "When they want to oblige me to live in the clouds," said she, "I put on my wooden shoes, and creep on the ground."

Besides, when she ceased to exhibit herself as youthful, which, though the most brilliant point of view, is not the most extensive, she became sensible that exalted sentiments did not occupy so great a place in life as she had imagined, and was in consequence more reconciled to the

world in general. In her eyes the human race had long been divided into two classes; that of persons endued with sensibility, to which she belonged; and that of beings altogether cold, in whom she was little interested. Like the statue of Pygmalion, she seemed to say successively of every thing she saw, "This is myself;" "This is not I;" "This too is myself." As she grew older she was more inclined to say, "This is myself," of all the dispositions of honorable minds.

Besides, in consequence of this continually increasing justice, she learned better to appreciate what is really valuable in life, and lost something, not of her pity, but of her too great esteem for misfortune. More happy herself, she was more inclined to consider existence as a benefit. "Even if I had no hope of a life to come," said she, "I should still give thanks to God for having lived, and for having known and loved my father."

For the same reason she had less dread of solitude, and knew better how to enjoy both the beauties of nature, and the exercise of thought.

She said to her son, as an incentive to study: "In the absence of extraordinary misfortunes I know no troubles, till five o'clock in the afternoon, when my literary labours cease for the day." She frequently quoted the example of Horne Tooke, who, at a very advanced age, said to Lord Erskine: "If you had only obtained for me ten years longer life, at the bottom of a dungeon, with books and pen and ink, I would still have thanked you."

It does not appear to me that years occasioned Madame de Staël any real loss. In her youth she had a wonderful faculty for extemporary versification, but she never ceased to employ as a poetess the materials, which she continually collected from study and observation; the sphere of her ideas was always increasing, various new worlds displayed themselves to her eyes one after another, and her successive discoveries gave birth to her various works. Thus, her knowledge of the torments inflicted by opinion, created *Delphine;* that of nature and the arts, *Corinna;* that of metaphysical notions and the ideal philosophy, *Ger-*

*many;* that of the political and social state of England, her last work. Every event left a result in her mind, every sentiment taught her something. The eternal youth of genius maintained its rights, while she enriched herself with the fruits of age.

Time had still treasures in reserve for her; and, for example, she wrote on the subject of her poem of *Richard:* "I think I shall give an excellent picture of the effects of imagination at a mature age; that age, when objects, soon to be obscured, are still illumined by the purple rays of the setting sun."

But what was particularly remarked in Madame de Staël, in proportion as she advanced in life, was a greater reserve, with manners more circumspect. Having sometimes found the inconvenience of giving indifferent persons a right to wound her feelings, she entered less freely into confidential topics. Accordingly, certain persons found her less charming, yet there was no coldness in her. Dreading emotions, and desirous of avoiding them, she had substituted for the generous nobleness of her former freedom,

that dignity, which keeps persons at a certain distance. She no longer desired to extend the circle of her affections, and did not seek to inspire new ones. Formerly she had said, "There is always a little coquetry in services rendered by women, since they seek thus to make themselves beloved." Towards the close of her life, she would scarcely admit of gratitude; the satisfaction of doing good was sufficient for her. "The door of my heart is shut," was her expression: but in this she was deceived. Never did any kind of excellence cease to interest her sensibility; but there was something pleasing to her ancient friends, in the idea of that barrier by which she separated them from the rest of the world.

The qualities of Madame de Staël acquired a character of greater solidity with age, and she valued solidity more in others. The whole theory of enthusiasm gave place to that of morality, her esteem for natural gifts was transferred to acquired virtues; courage and resignation obtained that admiration which she had formerly bestowed on great emotions of sensi-

bility. She was herself more calm; and, when she had no real cause of trouble, she did not invent chimerical ones. The majestic wave might swell in her heart, but it was a stranger to the tempest.

In the interior of her house I found her also more interesting, more attentive to others, for their own sakes: her kindness, her generosity, were exercised with more prudence and less distraction. Her expressions, being more measured, had more weight; her praises, more justly flattering, gave greater pleasure. Less irresistibly hurried on by the torrent of her thoughts, and her enthusiasm, she yielded freely to the pleasure of persuading or pleasing. What she had lost in vivacity, she gained in harmony and depth. Perhaps her countenance, having grown more pale, was more affecting: perhaps the brilliant flash of genius was still more striking on her countenance a little dejected. And who knows whether, in latter times, some precursory signs of the storm that was about to assail her life, some signs, the sinister presages of which we were afraid to interpret, did not

add to the value of her slightest words, and to the great and solemn impression she made upon us?

In a more extensive sphere, among foreign nations for instance, she never produced so much effect as during her latter years. At Paris her moderation and prudence were found to be remarkable. Always maintaining the grand interests of liberty in questions of domestic policy, she recommended with regard to foreigners all that circumspection which the situation of France demanded. She attached herself to the purest and sincerest friends of constitutional monarchy; and, as it was affirmed, did a great deal of political good. She was listened to with great respect: her predictions had been so often justified by the event, that what had been taken for inspiration appeared to be experience. More certain herself of carrying conviction, and knowing that henceforward she could neither be mistaken nor calumniated, she spoke with more authority.

Madame de Staël had certainly assumed confidence in herself, but without any mixture of

presumption. She appeared so much the more imposing as she did not speak in her own name, but appeared as the interpreter of the eternal laws of equity. It was no longer a great master of eloquence, taking pleasure in displaying his talent, but a missionary profoundly penetrated with the truths he unfolds; and the admiration, of which she was the object, was absorbed as it were in the attention excited by the subject she discussed. She herself was no longer in question, but what was of most importance to every individual; and as she spoke to men respecting their most urgent interests, to listen to her was their own concern. She painted in the strongest colours both the present moment and its inevitable consequences; she explained classes and nations to one another, and to each, the wants and sentiments of all. Her audience felt that she spoke the truth, and that facts would repeat with severity, what they would have refused to learn from her.

This is the reason why sovereigns themselves have listened to her eagerly, and often with emotion. And, when availing herself of her

supernatural power of moving the mind, she displayed, in the very dispensations of Providence which she unfolded, the alleviation of a mass of misery; when she pleaded the sacred cause of her country and of humanity, her auditors were hurried away, softened, electrified by her. Thus the renown of Madame de Staël was constantly increasing; her fame, already great in France, was imported into it afresh, as it were, by the enthusiasm of other nations, and without astonishing the witnesses of the effect she produced, we might have said that her eloquence hastened the dismissal of the three hundred thousand foreign soldiers, and the liberation of her country.

Among the happy effects of time on Madame de Staël must be included the greater stability that religious ideas were continually acquiring in her mind, and the improving habit of applying them to the actual occurrences of life. Her scruples, which had always looked to the consequences of her actions, attached themselves more to their motives. Prayer, that sentimental want of hers, placing her inces-

santly in communication with the source of all excellence, caused a pure light to penetrate her heart. "Whenever I am alone I pray:" said she to her children. She wrote to me from Sweden on the subject of Mr. de Montmorency: "There is no such thing as absence to the religious, because they meet in the sentiment of prayer." Every moment we find in her letters a request to pray for her, and her children.

Madame de Staël thought it was pride in man to endeavour to penetrate the secret of the universe; and speaking of the higher metaphysics she said: "I prefer the Lord's Prayer to it all." During her long periods of sleeplessness she was accustomed to repeat this prayer incessantly, in order to calm her mind. Sighs, certain exclamations that she was in the habit of uttering, were with her pious invocations. Thus the following words that escaped her frequently; "Poor human nature! alas! what are we? Ah, life, life!" were religious sentiments venting themselves.

That conviction too, so profound and so fre-

quently expressed, that divine justice already began to be exerted in this world, was piety in her. "Life," said she to her daughter, applying to religion a well-known comparison, "resembles Gobelins tapestry, the texture of which you cannot discern, when you look at it on the right side, but every thread of which is perceptible when you examine the back. The mystery of existence is the connexion of our faults with our sufferings. I never committed a wrong that was not the cause of a misfortune."

One thing that may appear strange was her application of the idea of retribution rather to the present life than to the life to come. "Catholic authors," she writes, "are constantly having recourse to hell: now without venturing to decide on such an article of faith, I could never perceive that it rendered people better." Nevertheless, in her fits of sorrow she frequently read Fenelon, as she found in him an admirable knowledge of the sufferings of the soul. *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, which did not please her at first, was also a resource for her toward the close of her life.

The Swedish gentleman* whom I have already mentioned made the following remark on Madame de Staël, which must be taken in a favourable sense: "She had the veneration of a child for the Christian religion."

It was in her last work that we find the following sublime sentence: "Man is reduced to dust by infidelity:" and this: "Religion is the life of the soul."

In 1815, as intolerance and religious fanaticism were continually the objects of her animadversion, I was apprehensive that religion itself would suffer in her mind, from the abuses committed under its sacred name. Having expressed my doubts to her on this head, she answered, "I assure you it is not the case. Piety has its share in my indignation, and not a quarter of an hour passes—I might perhaps say less—in which the idea of the Deity is not present to my heart."

We ought to express ourselves with mo-

* Mr. Brinckman.

desty, however, when we speak of the religious sentiments of those we have loved. We ought, indeed, for the sake of the world, since many people think they have a right to require more than human virtues in a heart that cherishes such sentiments: but we ought particularly when we think on their sublime object. It is not when we raise our eyes toward the Supreme Being that we can praise any mortal. "God alone is great." This fine expression, that resounded over the coffin of Lewis XIV., may equally be proclaimed over the tomb of those who have reigned by the power of their intellect. Madame de Staël spoke with modest diffidence of her piety: she had never any pride, but with respect to religion her heart was truly humble. The sentiment of her superiority forsook her both before those men devoted to God, to whom He has communicated wondrous lights, and before those simple hearts whom He has purified with His fire. She thought herself on the way, not at her journey's end: and though religion cannot yet impart either

perfection or happiness here below, she saw, in it, nevertheless, the only powerful means of advancing towards either.

That her progress was stopped, that Madame de Staël was torn from us at the moment when the noblest display of her qualities, as well as of her talents, had just announced itself, are among the ways of Providence that it is not for us to fathom. The sovereign Judge will weigh every thing; He will be merciful to genius. It is not to expose her to more perils that He has confided to her a sublime mission: and if the superior lights He imparted to her were a motive for severity towards her, the misfortunes, the troubles, the ardent fever, to which He seems to have condemned her upon earth, would present a stronger motive for indulgence.

### *Last Illness.—Conclusion.*

Shall I speak of the decay of such a person? Shall I call up images, that fate spared me, showing her for whole months wrestling with

sufferings, and with death? Shall I venture to depict to myself that imagination so formidable, that mind so penetrating, maintained during the course of a disease that gradually benumbed the organs of the most active, the most susceptible, the most lively of mortals? Ah that this fearful picture, which offers itself but too strongly to my thoughts, could be drawn by any other than myself! But as there were circumstances in the illness of Madame de Staël less painful to her friends, and some even consolatory, on these, no doubt, I may be allowed to dwell.

During this severe trial her character remained unaltered; and if she sometimes displayed, as was very natural, her great susceptibility of moral suffering, her complaints were never murmurs; she never revolted against her destiny. In the midst of these terrible agitations, that pass so rapidly from the body to the mind in disorders of this kind, her unalterable sweetness of temper never for a moment forsook her. To her last moment she was tender, confiding as an infant, and deeply grateful to

those about her, as well as to her incomparable friend, Mademoiselle Randall, whose attentions were as affecting as her attachment was profound. She was seen constantly exerting the virtues for which she was distinguished; and on the days when she suffered most pain, she was employed in acts of kindness. The pardon of a person condemned to die (Barry), which she had solicited during her illness, was obtained from the goodness of the king the day after her death; so that she did good even after she had breathed her last.

She was also heard to utter delightful sayings, in her peculiar way. "I have always been the same, lively and sad," she observed to Mr. Chateaubriand: "I have loved God, my father, and liberty."

On quoting these words of Fontenelle: "I am a Frenchman, I am fourscore years old, yet I never ridiculed the slightest virtue:" she added, "I can say as much of the slightest suffering."

Unquestionably she felt great regret at parting with her children and friends. Stoicism, or

the particular kind of enthusiasm that is capable of closing the heart to the pains of eternal separation, entered not into her character. Her daughter in particular cost her many tears. "With such treasures of affection," she dictated for me, in speaking of the objects of her regard, "it is a sad thing to quit life." "I should be very sorry," she said likewise, "if every thing were at an end between Albertine (Madame de Broglie) and me in another world." But she rather regretted life, than really feared death. She may have dreaded the last pangs; an imagination like hers may have felt some horrors at the idea of physical dissolution, terrible as it is to all of us; but death, morally considered, gave her no alarm. She preserved so much tranquillity, as to wish to dictate to Mr. Schlegel the description of what she felt. Her thoughts were always turned with hope towards her father, and towards immortality. "My father waits for me on the other shore," she said. She beheld her father with God, and in God himself could see nothing but a father. These two ideas were confounded in her heart; and that

of a protecting goodness was inseparable from both. One day, rousing from a state of reverie, she said: "I think I know what the transition from life to death is; and I am sure, that the goodness of God softens it to us. Our ideas become confused, and the pain is not very acute."

Her confidence was not disappointed: the profoundest tranquillity presided over her last moments. Long before she expired, the grand struggle had ended, and her soul departed gently.

Such was the end of Madame de Staël, the most loving genius, perhaps, that ever existed. The history of the regrets, of the fearful void, that followed her loss, is that of the remainder of our lives, and belongs not to hers: but that I may leave a less painful and more beneficial impression on the reader, I shall endeavour to trace the course of her thoughts in a religious point of view, the only one that enables us to embrace the whole of a person's destiny, and the connection it has with the general lot of mankind.

If it be interesting to the moralist to know the effect of life, to learn what to an enlightened mind is the natural result of those scenes which succeed each other pretty regularly in our existence, such an examination cannot be more instructive than when such a person as Madame de Staël is its subject. Too greedy of happiness, too ardent in all her desires, to have avoided the great throws, and to have escaped from the vicissitudes of fate, every event made an impression on a heart endued with great sensibility, and left a lesson on a mind singularly addicted to observation. Thus the occurrences of life acted upon her with all their force, and taught her all that is to be learned from them.

But what is it they teach? Is there a benevolent design in the general regulation of man's destiny? Madame de Staël was persuaded there is. She intended to write a book, entitled, "The Education of the Heart by the Occurrences of Life:" the mere design of composing such a work proves her conviction of a continual state of improvement.

Let us cursorily examine the education that

she received from life. Endowed with a mind most expansive, at that age when the enlargement of the faculties seems to be enjoined to all the animate creation, she enlarges and exercises her understanding incessantly: friendship, filial affection, have in her an exalted character. Her first religious impressions are received as an additional sentiment, and perhaps as a source of more sublime emotions. But youth soon arrives, that age at once reasoning and enthusiastic, when the heart believes every thing, and the mind believes nothing, when an examination of every question leads to a rejection of every decision, and when, very often, a rigid stoicism in principle only allows a stronger hold to the sophistry of the passions. The influence of this period of life, and that of the times, which were in unison with it, may have been felt by Madame de Staël: but the idea of the Divinity is not altered in her heart, and a premature faculty of observation soon leads her to this grand conclusion, that in the indulgence of the passions there is no happiness. All worldly sentiments she declares to be dangerous; and in the

shipwreck of her hopes she sees no sure resource but charity and resignation, two eminently Christian virtues, to which she pays homage under other names. But subsequently turning her scrutinising eye on history, and on the labours of the human mind, she is astonished at what she discovers, and Christianity displays itself to her in its true light. Struck with its great influence, she is still more so with its beauty. She feels that a secret harmony with the feelings of the heart, with all that is good and noble in our nature, can alone explain such effects; and by degrees she is prepared to receive, as a divine law, a law salutary to mankind: the experience of the succour, and inward consolation, derived from prayer, strengthens this disposition in her, but it was reserved for affliction to regenerate her whole soul, and open her heart to the Christian faith.

When we reflect, that this same course, pursued with so much lustre by Madame de Staël in a superior region, is trodden by innumerable beings in the sphere assigned to each; when we perceive succeeding each other, in almost

every situation, the illusion of the passions; then their hopes disappointed; next their observation of individuals, and of society, which leads to a perception of the advantages of religion in respect to morality, peaceableness, and domestic harmony; and, lastly, those sorrows, inevitable in maturer years; those sorrows, destitute of the pompous emotions of youth, those sorrows, in which the heart, deprived of the power of diverting its attention from them, and retaining that of suffering, can no longer listen to any thing but the voice that promises another existence; when we consider, I say, the whole of this arrangement, does it not seem to have been planned for the purpose of subjecting the heart to the sway of religion? does it not seem, that the Being, who is the beginning and the end, the origin and the limit, has launched us for a moment in the flood of life, only because the flux of the wave tends to bring us back to him?

Madame de Staël has done much good in the age in which she lived. I do not here advert to the assistance of every kind she lavished on misfortune, or the prodigious mass of pleasure

and instruction imparted by her conversation and writings; what I more delight to reflect on at present is, that she was useful to the sacred cause of religion. This, perhaps, she was in a greater degree, as she did not formally propose to plead its cause; but from the profound persuasion, the inward and powerful sentiment, which display themselves involuntarily in her writings.

As she announced no design, infidelity could not arm itself beforehand against her. She always presented herself with mildness and simplicity. She did not speak as a doctor of the law, or as an austere preacher; but deriving a new kind of strength precisely from what she had experienced, from having been fond of every thing that could charm the heart or mind upon earth, she has said to men of the world, to statesmen, to men of letters: Every thing that interests, that animates you, has engaged my attention also; but I have found that there is nothing great or durable without religion; nothing else to support morals, the stay of society; no other resource in misfortune, and without it even talents are desti-

tute of their loftiest inspiration. They who have never soared toward heaven have never caught the creative spark, and will never obtain even the shadow of the immortality conferred by renown.

Such a genius as that of Madame de Staël is the only missionary that could possibly succeed in a learned and reasoning, a frivolous and disdainful world. Without entering into the temple itself, she has taken her stand before the porch, and chaunted the prelude of sacred song before the multitude, who, Pagans in their hearts, offer incense to the Muses, and stone the prophets.

But it is to persons endued with sensibility, that she has addressed herself in preference: and, like the great apostle who found in Athens an altar consecrated to the unknown God, she says to the tender and enthusiastic: "The unknown God, whom ye worship, Him declare we unto you."

THE END.

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